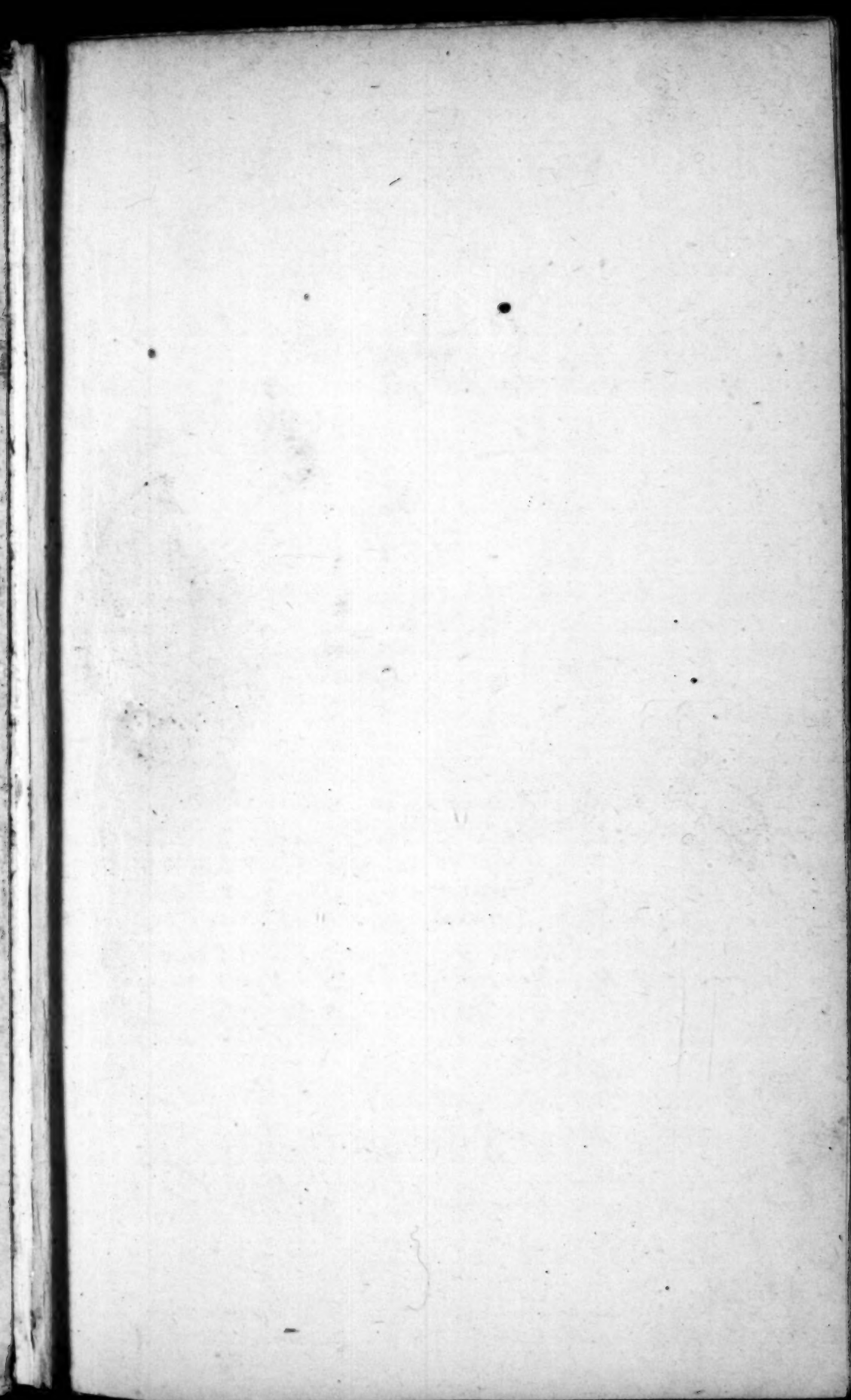




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# ERMINA MONTROSE;

OR,

## THE COTTAGE OF THE VALE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

WITH CHARACTERS FROM LIFE.

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This heart, which owns the purest flame,  
Must patient throb, nor dare to blame,  
Since fortune's frowns the fates decree  
Through ev'ry scene should follow me.

ROBINSON.

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BY EMILY CLARK,

GRAND-DAUGHTER OF THE LATE COLONEL FREDERICK,  
AND AUTHOR OF

"*IANTHE; OR, THE FLOWER OF CAERNARVON.*"

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VOL I.

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1800.

THE COTTAGE OF THE FINE  
 IN THREE VOLUMES  
 WITH CHARACTERS FROM LIFE

THE FIRST VOLUME  
 BY MRS. J. K. B. B. B.  
 LONDON: J. K. B. B. B.

THE COTTAGE OF THE FINE  
 IN THREE VOLUMES  
 WITH CHARACTERS FROM LIFE



T. Davison,  
 White-Friars.

TO  
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
COUNTESS OF SHAFTESBURY.

MADAM,

IT is unnecessary for me to express my obligations for your ladyship's kind protection of the following pages: for a heart like yours is equally capable of feeling itself, as of interpreting the feelings of others. Were I to fill this dedication with the too accustomed and fulsome encomiums made use of on similar occasions, I am well aware it would be as disagreeable for you to read as for me to attempt writing such. I will, therefore, only simply again offer my most grateful thanks to your ladyship for the honour you have done me in patronizing *Ermina*, conscious as I am of the very little merit she possesses, yet entering the world

under such auspices as yours, I should hold it wrong to doubt her success, for the severest censurer will be less rigorous in opinion, as she appears protected by so exalted a character as yours.

I have the honour to be, with profound respect,

Madam,

Your ladyship's

Most obedient,

Most devoted,

Humble servant,

EMILY CLARK.

*No. 4, Cockspur-street,  
Haymarket.*



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# ERMINA MONTROSE.

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## CHAPTER I.

“ Sweeter than on the vernal bough  
“ Buds Nature’s first perfume ;  
“ A babe had crown’d our nuptial vow—  
“ In beauty’s softest bloom.”

**E**MBOSOMED in the deep romantic valley of Riversdale, stood the habitation of Colonel Montrose. Simple was its structure, being little superior to the cottages of the neighbouring rustics. Yet, with all its simplicity, dear was this abode to his feeling heart; for it had sheltered his beloved Ermina from the storms of life, and witnessed her flight to those regions of happiness, which the superior virtues of her mind rendered

VOL. I. B her

her worthy of attaining. The soft harmony of her voice, the æthereal sweetness of her smile, all dwelt on his imagination with forcible and pained remembrance.

Oh! souls of sympathy, cannot ye picture to yourselves the poignant anguish which overwhelms to agony a mind of sensibility, when it has lost a tenderly beloved friend and companion? What is the grief of common souls compared to theirs, who wear not only the semblance of sorrow, but its keenest shafts penetrate their lacerated bosoms; and objects that formerly created pleasure, serve only to bring the mournful recollection, that, alas! the chief source of delight is fled for ever?

Ye peaceful woods, exclaimed Colonel Montrose, once did ye enclose within your quiet shades, my loved Ermina, who trod with me your retired walk, happy as conscious

scious integrity and spotless innocence could make her. Ah! when will time soften the violence of my emotions, and suffer memory to dwell with mellowed grief on the sweet idea of that matchless worth, which offered to your sex a bright example of unshaken virtue? Here he paused, overcome by a violent gush of sorrow, sad reflection too truly representing that the cruel hand of death had severed her from him for ever. But recovering himself, he again exclaimed, Yes, my child; for thee will I strive to live, beloved relict of the best of women! You alone are left to teach me to resume my fortitude, which has quite forsaken me. The little Ermina, at this interesting moment, looked wistfully in her father's face; and though too young to comprehend the extent of his sorrows, or her own, mingled her infantine tears with his, at seeing him weep. His caresses, however, soon calmed her. Her face became



again dimpled with good humour; and throwing her little arms round his neck with the sportive affection of her age, by innocently prattling, she diverted his attention from the indulgence of his melancholy reflections, and caused a faint smile to play over his countenance. It was the only beam of happiness that had for a long interval gained admittance there, as the sight of Ermina, till within a few days, had been more than he could support. But he had finally struggled against these sensations, endeavouring to derive consolation rather than additional grief from her society, and hoped in the culture of her tender mind, and in watching its expansion, to chase despondency from his breast, bending with submissive resignation to his destiny, though his trial was severe.

Ermina's maternal grand-father was a haughty imperious nobleman, who had no idea of any happiness beyond the tinsel  
and

and glare of grandeur; nor could the most distinguished merit draw from him an approving smile, unless its possessor was likewise endowed with wealth and title. With such sentiments, it is not surprising that he should feel exasperated at his daughter's attaching herself to Colonel Montrose (whom she afterwards married), as a virtuous noble heart, and a small estate, besides his colonel's pay, was all the fortune he could claim. Well aware of his implacability, Montrose never attempted but once to deprecate his wrath on their marriage, and that was by writing to him, when he received an answer filled with so many cutting reproaches, and severe invectives against himself, as well as his beloved wife, that he resolved never to make any farther concessions. This letter, he, however, concealed from Mrs. Montrose, and retired two years after, on half-pay, to his

present sweet retreat in Westmoreland, where he enjoyed a life of uninterrupted felicity till her death, which, alas ! gave a fatal wound to his peace. No longer had this favourite spot any charms for him ; and he often thought of flying from a place, that, by reminding him of the dear lost object of his affections, heightened his sorrows. An additional pang was the reflection, that Lord Belvidere, her unfeeling father, would (from the hatred he had lately conceived against them) rejoice at an event that rent his bosom with anguish. But he consoled and flattered himself with the hope, that he would receive no intelligence relative to them, as Mrs. Montrose and himself had formed the resolution of keeping their place of residence concealed, apprehensive he might concert (if he knew it) some method of revenging himself for his daughter's disobedience. Impressed with these

these ideas, they had fixed on the solitary habitation at Riverdale, as most favourable for their concealment.

Often would Colonel Montrose wander among the tall woods of gloomy pine, that shaded his retired cottage; and in their deepest recesses he erected a monument in fond remembrance of her he loved. It consisted of an urn of white marble, on which the name of Ermina was inscribed; and on the pedestal that supported it, was engraven the following simple inscription:

ERMINA MONTROSE,

Who expired in the twenty-fifth year of her age,

Mourned in death,

As she was beloved through life,

With the most ardent affection.

In this hallowed spot, the amiable Colonel Montrose would retire to bathe the inanimate marble with tears of soft regret, devoid of the bitter anguish he at first experienced,



perienced, but meekly resigned; for his disposition was naturally mild and contemplative. Though he possessed the spirit becoming a soldier, it was united (which seldom happens) with a sincere piety, that gave him strength to bear his loss, after the first agony of sorrow, with a fortitude becoming his general character, which was distinguished by exalted virtues. But, notwithstanding these exertions, on his sweet and placid countenance a deep melancholy was frequently discernible; and as Ermina advanced in years, he would conduct her to her mother's urn, early instructing her to revere her memory, by describing the perfections that adorned her when living. But it was scarcely necessary to impress on her docile mind these affectionate sentiments; for it was framed in nature's softest mould, its dawning virtues promising to do honour to the memory of the excellent Mrs. Montrose.

The

The colonel presided over his daughter's education with tender and watchful care, as she had no other instructors than himself and Mrs. Heywood, wife of the clergyman of the neighbouring village. This lady instructed her in all the acquirements proper for her sex, which she was capable of doing, being an elegant, accomplished, and well-informed woman. An intimacy was established between the family at the Parsonage-house, and the inhabitants at Riversdale: for Mrs. Heywood had acquired a truly maternal affection for the sweet little Ermina, which was strengthened by the regard she preserved for the memory of her mother, whom she knew and esteemed. Her daughter Merelina, some years older than Ermina, was her constant companion, and they became mutually attached to each other. The colonel was partial to the society of these worthy people, as they united refinement with a frankness

of manners that quite charmed him. He felt likewise the advantage of Mrs. Heywood's attention to his child; convinced the part she took in her education was of infinite service, as he would have found it difficult to procure a lady in whom he could have placed sufficient confidence to intrust the entire management of her education; as purity of morals, united with an accomplished mind, is as rare as it is valuable.

Mr. Heywood and his wife would frequently accompany the colonel in his rambles through the beautiful, magnificent scenery, and variety of landscape, with which nature delighted to adorn the country that surrounded his sequestered abode. Ermina and Merelina, with the vivacity natural to their age, would frolick before their parents, dancing or running with an agility similar to the squirrel that hopped from bough to bough

bough amongst the chestnut trees that grew near the cottage. They early imbibed a taste for sketching the beauty of the scenes amongst which they roved; and the projecting point of a rock covered with moss, its craggy summit crowned with yellow broom and purple heath, intermixed with the creeping periwinkle, sweet-scented thyme, and wild rose, or a sheet of water falling from a stupendous height, was among their favourite style of landscapes. The cottage and the parsonage were ornamented with their drawings, as the colonel and his friends had many of their views framed, to encourage the children in a taste for these rational amusements, judging very properly, that the best method of preserving their minds in a state of purity and innocence, was to furnish them with numberless resources against indolence. For constant employment banishes *ennui*, creates an habitual cheerfulness, and a



variety of occupations relieves, instead of fatiguing, the spirits, which are often depressed by inaction.

Each year, as it rolled away, brought some accomplishment in Ermina nearer to perfection, and rendered her more lovely and amiable. The colonel viewed her growing excellencies with delight, though a tear would frequently glisten in his eye, as he perceived the resemblance to her mother more apparent as she grew older; but when the cloud of sorrow darkened his brow, Ermina endeavoured, and generally with success, to banish his uneasiness, and make him in love with the happiness her conciliating manners and tender attention were sufficient to inspire. By her innocent gaiety, and fascinating conversation, she softened his cares, and soothed his mind when it dwelt with painful remembrance on the sorrows of his life. She inherited his  
benevolent

benevolent disposition, and they exercised together, to the extent of their power, the duties of charity and compassion to the indigent, which produced them the most refined pleasure. Thus passed their days in peace and virtue, undisturbed by any new regrets.

## CHAP. II.

" How happy is the blameless vestals lot,  
 " The world forgetting, by the world forgot !"

POPE.

WHEN Ermina entered her fourteenth year, the colonel, who was anxious that she should speak the French language with purity and ease, resolved for her improvement to endure the pain of being separated from her, and, by placing her in a convent till she was sixteen, make her education more finished. He recollected an order of Dominican nuns, whose monastery was situated near Toulouse in Languedoc, the most pleasant province in the south of France; and the instant he had formed the resolution of taking his daughter there, he wrote to the superior of

of St. Catherine's to prepare for her reception. Mrs. Montrose had boarded some months at this convent, which had brought it to the recollection of the colonel, and made him give it the preference to any other. Ermina was perfectly resigned to the wishes of her father, when informed of his intention; as, independent of the sorrow she felt at being within so short a period to lose her beloved parent's society, she was pleased at the idea of the many novelties she should meet with in France, and painted to herself, with the ardency of a youthful imagination unchecked by disappointment, the numerous pleasures she should enjoy: nor did one unpleasant thought intrude, to destroy her visionary plans of happiness. Thus passes the first gay dawn of youth, in forming visions of unreal joys, which soon, ah, too soon! fade away.

Three weeks after the colonel's resolution



lution of parting with his daughter, he embarked with her from Dover, and after a very agreeable voyage, the weather being remarkably fine, they reached Calais. Ermina had felt much affected when she bade adieu to Mr. and Mrs. Heywood and her dear Merelina. But the amusement of travelling and having her father with her, soon dissipated her regret at parting from her early friends, and the sweet abode of her youth.

The convent of St. Catherine was situated on the borders of an extensive forest, and the dark waving trees which encompassed it, diffused a gloomy air over the edifice, which was of great antiquity. Ermina's heart sunk within her when conducted to its massy gates, nor could she refrain from bursting into tears when they closed upon her father. The prospect within its walls, which first met her view,

view, increased the depression of her spirits, being melancholy in the extreme to a mind unaccustomed to objects so awful. The nuns endeavoured to sooth her by the most winning attentions, which the sweetness of her disposition, made an easy task, and she appeared grateful to them for the tenderness they evinced towards her. Feeling fatigued after the journey, and wishing to retire to rest, they conducted her to her apartment; but she was struck with horror when she entered it, to find the windows looked into the burying ground of the convent, in the centre of which was a figure of our Saviour on the cross as large as life, and the apartment was so extensive that the bedstead placed there looked, in comparison, like a drop of water in the sea. To prevent Ermina's neglecting her French, the colonel had hired a French waiting maid to attend her. Terefe possessed all the gaiety and volubility of her

her nation, and slept in a large light closet adjacent to Miss Montrose's apartment.

The superior of St. Catherine's was mildness personified; she had been very beautiful, but an air of sorrow was visible in her countenance. To our heroine she soon became fondly attached, who returned her regard with grateful affection, and in a short time was quite reconciled to her new situation, where she was greatly beloved, as she blended with suavity of manners, an artless and engaging vivacity, which it was impossible to know and not admire. Ermina was particularly beloved by sister Madeleine, who was celebrated throughout the convent for her singular piety, and revered for her virtue and the severe discipline she practised, yet her greatest penance was to debar herself from the sight of Miss Montrose for a long interval.

She

She would frequently lash herself for the space of seven or eight days with the utmost rigour, and live at the same time so abstemiously, that she was reduced to the last extremity, and her life very much endangered, though this order was an exceeding easy one. The nuns were in general cheerful and happy, continually giving some little entertainment to diversify the sameness that must otherwise have prevailed in their retired life, and rendered it dull and irksome to a great degree. They amused themselves likewise in working different fancy works, in which the French ladies are certainly very ingenious and have peculiar taste. In these innocent recreations they employed their thoughts, and were consequently animated, happy, and contented.

It was customary when a nun had been fifty years in the convent to have an entertainment, which they styled a jubilee,



jubilee, as it continued a week ; and when she had resided there five-and-twenty years, it was usual to have a half jubilee. Some months after Emina's residence at St. Catherine's, sister Madelaine had the latter honour conferred on her, and Ermina, the morning that this festival commenced, as a proof of her gratitude and attachment to the good sister, ornamented the door of her cell before she quitted it, with garlands and festoons of flowers, and every other embellishment she could devise. This innocent and affectionate attention which her young friend shewed to please her, made the worthy Madelaine smile with pleasure.

On the anniversary festival of Ermina's saint, for in compliance with their customs she had chose one, the superior, sister Madelaine, and those nuns who were her particular friends, presented her with different

different gifts, and she regaled them in her apartment with cakes, liqueurs, and sweetmeats. In the enjoyment of these simple innocent pleasures, time flew rapidly away, and every day increased the attachment she began to form for a life of seclusion, while she breathed a secret wish, could she see her father frequently, that she might never go beyond the walls of St. Catherine.

She was walking one evening in the garden with sister Madelaine, when a nun passed them, whom she had never seen before. Her eyes were cast towards the ground, and raising them only to return Madelaine's salutation again reclined them. She appeared to be fifty years of age; but her form and face wore the traces of having been perfectly handsome. Her complexion was the finest imaginable, her eyes were of a soul-subduing blue, her hair was auburn, and every other feature regularly lovely; but deep

deep melancholy apparently had settled in her heart. "Who is that interesting woman, my good friend?" demanded Ermina. "Alas! my child," rejoined the benevolent Madelaine, "it is the unfortunate sister Julienne; she is ever as you now behold her, the picture of woe, with her eyes inclined towards the ground. In the first bloom of her life she loved, and was beloved again by a chevalier, handsome, elegant, and brave, and of a noble family, but, as is too frequently the case, without fortune. Her birth is distinguished; but, being the youngest daughter of a numerous family, her parents could not make any provision for her, and, dreading lest she should disgrace them by uniting herself to poverty, they procured his banishment from France, and forced her to take the veil. From that fatal period, till within these two last years, she has been raving mad; and, though reason has now resumed its place,

the

the remembrance of her sorrow cannot be effaced. A few months, it is probable, will end her miserable existence, as she labours under a complication of disorders; and it is wonderful that her constitution, delicate as it is, has not before sunk beneath such long and repeated struggles."

Tears of tender pity moistened Ermina's cheek, as sister Madelaine related the hapless fate of the unhappy Julienne; and it nearly extinguished her enthusiasm for the monastic life, from its having been the instrument of creating so much misery. Sister Madelaine was pleased with the effect of her narration, as she was always averse to Ermina's making choice of it, endeavouring by numberless arguments to dissuade her from indulging so dangerous a predilection.

Ermina occasionally visited at Monsieur du Bourg's, who was an opulent banker  
at



at Toulouse, and appointed by her father to supply her with money, and have the guardianship of her while separated from him. Amongst the visitors she occasionally associated with at Monsieur du Bourg's was the Count de Valcour. He was naturally ardent, impetuous, and gay, in the extreme ; rather vain of his person, which was uncommonly fine, but at the same time generous and brave, with the promising expectation, that when the first ardour of youth was abated, he would correct the impetuosity of his disposition.

He soon professed himself violently enamoured with Ermina, and paid her the most marked and flattering attentions, which, though she did not wish to encourage, she yet received with some pleasure, as was extremely natural in so young a girl, who never had a lover before ; for I do not mean to make a prodigy of her  
at

at fifteen, but confess she was not free from trifling failings, though as perfect as it is possible for erring human nature to be. Often would he execrate the inexorable walls of St. Catherine, which concealed her from him ; and one day, when he was rallied about it, with an air of levity, vowed to force himself within them. Ermina smiled with an air of incredulity, while she assured him he would find it impossible ; but he continued to persist that he would not only get admittance, but even visit her in her own apartment. To these, as she thought absurd, assertions, she paid no attention ; when, a few days afterwards, some repairs which were making in the convent, obliged the great gates to be opened, and the Count, who watched continually about the walls, seizing this advantageous opportunity, disguised himself in a long red capuchin cloak, worn by the lower class of females, which reached to his feet, with a large hood that

fell over his face, and hastily addressing himself to the portress, asked for sister Madelaine. Without waiting for an answer, delighted with his success so far (as she admitted him without hesitation) he flew swiftly across the passages, instantaneously directing his steps to the apartment of Ermina, of the situation of which he had previously gained an exact description. He found her the victim of terror, as she had seen him enter the gates; and the cloak flying back in his hasty march, and discovering his sword and male attire, had already thrown the whole convent into alarm. The bells were rung, the sisterhood assembled in the community, whilst Ermina, terrified and trembling, reproached him for his imprudence, which he already repented, as it caused her so much uneasiness. Sister Madelaine now made her appearance, and afforded relief to Ermina, by saying, the Superior, in pity to her and to quiet her apprehensions,

sions, would pardon the Count; but cautioned him to beware of presuming on her lenity. "But as you are here, monsieur," said the good humoured nun, "you shall not depart without taking some refreshment with my dear child after her alarm;" and in a few minutes she placed some wine and biscuits before them. When he had refreshed himself, she conducted him to the gate as quietly as possible. Thus terminated this affair to the entire satisfaction of Ermina, who had been apprehensive of a more unpleasant conclusion, and it left an agreeable impression of the Superior and Madelaine's goodness on de Valcour's mind.

Another adventure soon after happened to Ermina. One of her favourite amusements was to dress in the habit of a nun, which was particularly advantageous to her beauty, as the habit of this sisterhood was very becoming. It consisted of a robe



of white serge, white scapulaire, and a veil of black crape lined with white.— Thus dressed, she would frequently request permission of the portress to officiate at the turning-box of the convent, which was generally complied with, as she was indulged in every request she made, so much was she beloved. As she was amusing herself in this manner, some English gentlemen passed by, and the liveliest of them, seized with a frolicksome whim, desired the supposed Touriere to turn the turning-box. She complied, but fastened him in it, and he found himself almost suffocated with being pent up in the box. He exclaimed, “For God’s sake, good mother, release me, and I vow never to offend again.” After amusing herself with detaining him a prisoner for some time, she at length set him free. At first sight she was alarmed from the fear that he might have effected his escape into the convent, and incurred her the anger of the

the Superior; but the dexterity with which she fastened him in the turning-box converted her apprehensions to mirth.— She had inadvertently thrown up the veil which should have concealed her face, and the gentleman perceived through the opening in the box, how lovely she was, and from that period was constantly conveying billets-doux by the Touriere, who was sister to Terefe, to the beautiful portress, as he styled her. But as she continued obstinate in refusing to accept them, she was soon released from his importunities.

Father Eustache, a Benedictine monk, often visited at St. Catherine's, where he was much esteemed for his piety and humility, though only eight and twenty. His conversation was interesting and improving; his manners were mild, and when he spoke of the charms of virtue, the beauty of piety, and the rewards of the just, he

was particularly impressive and affecting. Ermina was always delighted to hear him converse, and glad of an opportunity of listening to him. Pleased with the deference she evidently paid to his sentiments and opinions, he conceived a sincere esteem for her, which he demonstrated by directing her studies to those parts of literature which were most likely to inform and improve the female mind. As a mark of attention, he invited Monsieur and Madame du Bourg, with a party of their friends, to visit his convent, as it contained some very famous paintings; and he invited Miss Montrose to accompany them. The day previous to this visit, she said to Eustache, "I shall see you, I hope, to-morrow, my good father?"—"Ah, mademoiselle," he replied with a smile, "not to-morrow, for on that day it will be an infringement of the rules of my order, should I quit my cell to behold you. Take care that you do not approach it,

it, and I will give you a clear direction how to avoid it." He then proceeded to explain, as minutely as possible, where it was situated, that she might easily discover it, and pay him a visit; as he wished her to understand that his meaning was quite opposite to his words.

Ermina, comprehending the hint, immediately upon the arrival of her party and herself, at the Benedictine Monastery, advised them all to direct their steps with her to the cell of Eustache, where they found themselves expected, and an elegant collation prepared for their entertainment, of fruits, sweetmeats, ices, and other delicacies, with various sorts of wine, and the worthy Eustache saw them with pleasure partake of it. This convent was a very gloomy fabric, and they met with nothing worthy of observation in it but the paintings, which were uncommonly fine.



Though condemned to the gloom of a cloister, Eustache could not stifle the feelings of nature, and found, when too late for his repose, that the pleasure of frequently conversing with, and enjoying the society of the fair Ermina, had caused the wreck of his peace. Young, handsome, elegant, and formed to adorn the most polished circles of life, he poignantly felt, for the first time, the severity of his lot, and how wounding it was to be shut out for ever from those joys of domestic felicity, which the meanest peasants know. He now shunned (convinced of his unfortunate passion) instead of seeking, as formerly, the company of Ermina; and when she unconsciously regretted that she saw so little of him, he offered some plausible excuse to satisfy her enquiries.

## CHAPTER III.

" For her the spouse prepares the bridal ring ;  
 " For her white virgins Hymeneals sing ;  
 " For her th' unfading rose of Eden blooms,  
 " And wings of Seraphs shed divine perfumes ;  
 " To sounds of heavenly harps she dies away,  
 " And melts in visions of eternal day."

POPE.

**T**HE time now approached within a few months, when Ermina was to bid farewell to the peaceful walls of St. Catherine, as she had nearly completed her sixteenth year, which was the period fixed by her father for her return to England. At the prospect of quitting the amiable Superior, and her beloved Madelaine, she felt the most painful reluctance ; and unable to endure the idea of being separated from them, with the romantic enthusiasm of a

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young

young mind unfullied by the world, she wrote to the colonel, entreating he would permit her to take the veil. Her inclination for a cloister had been lately strengthened by seeing a young English lady of distinction make her last vows with the utmost joy and satisfaction ; and she herself assured Ermina that she was miserable till she had taken the black veil, from the fear of any circumstance happening to prevent her professing. This lady was only two years older than our heroine, and very lovely, though not regularly handsome ; and Ermina was much affected at seeing her take the veil, particularly with that part of the ceremony, which is very solemn, where the black velvet pall is thrown over the nun, and the bell tolls for her, as dead to the world.

Colonel Montrose was shocked at the perusal of his daughter's letter, for he trembled at the idea of her renouncing  
the

the world, as it would exclude all comfort from his breast, bringing past misfortunes with redoubled bitterness to his remembrance. Misery seemed never weary of persecuting him, for though he was acquainted with the dutiful obedience of her disposition, and knew that she would sacrifice her first wishes to oblige him; yet he considered, that if her inclination was seriously fixed on taking the veil, she would most probably be miserable at submitting her predilection to her duty.—Undetermined how to act, and being so critically situated, Colonel Montrose hastened to France, and gave Ermina a most agreeable surprise by the unexpected sight of him. He found her as his imagination predicted, eager to comply with his every wish, but easily discerned that she nourished a secret melancholy at the most distant idea of quitting St. Catherine's; nor could he so much wonder at it, as he remembered she had imbibed of him, from her



earliest recollection, the greatest distaste for a world that had cruelly treated him, and which he supposed had increased her indifference to it, as she was acquainted with what he had suffered. Independent of her father, Ermina had no one individual in England, except the family at the vicarage, to whom she had any attachment; and she was ashamed to own (as she thought it ungrateful for the kindness they had shewn her) that she had a warmer affection for her favourite Madeline than for any of her English friends.

The colonel, when conversing with his daughter on the subject of her taking the veil, lamented that such an event would deprive him of her society. "Do not consider it in that light, my dear father," she replied, "you have no ties to attach you to England—cannot you therefore reside in France? and if you will consent to fix on a residence near mine, we can frequently

frequently see and converse with each other." Though not satisfied, he resolved no longer to combat with her inclinations, but suffer her to enter into the novitiate, consoling himself with the hope that before the expiration of a twelvemonth, her enthusiasm might lose somewhat of its fervor.

In consequence of this resolution he had formed, Colonel Montrose consented that the day might be appointed for her taking the white veil. Innumerable were the spectators present on this occasion, as the beauty of the young English novice caused a great deal of conversation. The colonel's spirits sunk, overcome with melancholy reflections, though he had summoned resolution to attend the ceremony: for never did a more beautiful and interesting figure appear than Ermina. She was dressed, as is the custom, in a most splendid

splendid style. When she entered the chapel she was placed in a chair, the nuns, with the Superior at their head, ranged around her with lighted tapers in their hands. Two children stood on each side, dressed in white, holding baskets of flowers, while she read her vows aloud. She then arose and walked to the grating, where she knocked. The Priest asked her what she wanted; she answered to be admitted into that holy society. He replied by demanding if she had well considered that she must renounce the world and all its vanities. When she had given an affirmative reply to this question, he cut off a lock of her hair, and bade her go. She then left the chapel, and returned dressed in the habit of the order, with the white veil worn by the novices, and prostrating herself on the ground, the children strewed flowers over her, and the ceremony concluded with a procession of the nuns and novices, singing with such  
dulcet

dulcet harmony, as raised the soul to heavenly meditation.

Affected as Colonel Montrose was by this touching scene, hope yet renovated his spirits, prompting him to indulge what was by no means an imaginary illusion, that various circumstances might tend to weaken the passion she had imbibed for a monastic life. Influenced by this expectation, he resolved not to revisit England, till the twelvemonth of Ermina's noviciate was expired. Having formed the resolution, he remained in France, visiting constantly at St. Catherine's, where he had always the mortification to observe that Ermina continued contented with her new vocation, and attached with the same enthusiastic affection to her religious friends.

The Count de Valcour heard with mingled surprise and grief, that Ermina had  
entered



entered into her noviciate. It was the first intelligence he received on his return to Toulouse, which the death of his father had obliged him to leave for Paris, where he was some months engaged in settling his affairs. The pleasures of that gay capital had occasioned a momentary oblivion of his friends at Toulouse; but on his return, the lovely recluse flashed on his imagination with redoubled fondness, and he was impatient to declare himself to her, and request permission at the same time to make proposals to her father for an immediate union; not doubting, with the vanity inherent in his character, as he looked with approbation at his fine figure in the glass, that she would accept him with a joy highly flattering. What a thorough mortification was then the cruel news imparted to him, of her intention of taking the veil, as it denoted the utmost indifference; but, whispered vanity, if I had perhaps made serious love, she would  
 most

most certainly have accepted me. "How unlucky," he exclaimed, "not to have been more premature in declaring myself, and to become enamoured with the only girl in the world that I am convinced would immure herself with a legion of grim-faced nuns from inclination!" In these ridiculous observations and absurd invectives did de Valcour vent the vexation he felt at his disappointment, till he had exhausted every epithet he could think of or invent, to express how much he was chagrined and incensed. When he had thoroughly tormented himself, he ordered the carriage that conveyed him to Toulouse to be prepared for another journey; resolving to absent himself from a place that reminded him of the object he adored, and had lost for ever. Dispirited and mortified, he threw himself carelessly into his coach, and, as the route he made choice of obliged him to penetrate through the forest adjacent to St. Catherine's,

Catherine's, he turned hastily away from a glimpse of the venerable edifice, detesting it as a prison that enclosed the woman dearest to his heart.

## CHAPTER IV.

" But Love will pierce the lone recess,  
 " For there he loves to dwell ;  
 " He scorns the noisy crowd to bless,  
 " And seeks the lowly cell."

WILLIAMS.

**T**HE moon had just risen with unusual brilliancy, softening the objects around with mellowed lustre, and darting its beams through the trees of a thick wood, to which Colonel Montrose approached. He was returning to Toulouse after an absence of several days, at this late hour, unattended by his servant, whom he had ordered to ride on to the town with his horses, preferring to walk himself, as the evening was remarkably fine. He had nearly reached the entrance of the wood,

when



when three ruffians suddenly rushed from some bushes that concealed them, and attacked him with indefcribable fury. With the most undaunted courage, he stood upon his defence for several minutes against their united attacks, but must have finally fallen a victim to their numbers, had not a gentleman passing by at this dangerous and critical moment, and beholding the inequality of the combat, flown instantly to his assistance. The guilty are in general cowards, and this reinforcement on the colonel's side, soon made the villains fly. To this brave deliverer Colonel Montrose was profuse in his acknowledgments, and though his wounds were but slight, was obliged to be supported by him to Toulouse, as he felt weak from a considerable loss of blood, which he had sustained during his engagement with the ruffians. On their arrival at the town, the brave stranger, who had escaped unhurt, procured a carriage

riage to convey him to his own lodgings, and attended till a surgeon came and dressed his wounds, from whom he learnt they were not in the least dangerous, and with the aid of a soporific draught, the colonel passed a very quiet night.

On his awaking the next morning, he found himself much refreshed, and Lord Henry Beauchamp, his gallant defender, called very early to enquire after his health. Colonel Montrose was glad to find he was his countryman, and now viewed with pleasure and admiration (which, almost insensible from weakness, he had not noticed before) a face and figure which was the perfection of manly beauty and graceful elegance. He was tall, with the air and figure of an hero of romance; his countenance open and ingenuous, and every emotion and sentiment of his soul was expressed in his large blue eyes, where sweetness and animation

mation were both blended. They were shaded by dark brown eye-lashes, of the same colour as his hair and eye-brows; his nose was aquiline, his complexion fair and ruddy, without the least effeminate look, and a smile of the utmost fascination played around his beautiful mouth, ornamented with the finest teeth imaginable. His manner was dignified, and the goodness visible in his countenance demonstrated to every penetrating mind that the soul lodged in that elegant form did not disgrace it. But what surprised Colonel Montrose was, to observe him evidently oppressed with a gloomy melancholy that he easily discerned he struggled to suppress, but with little success; as, when engaged in the most animated and interesting conversations, he suddenly sunk into fits of deep abstraction, remaining insensible to all that passed around, as if quite alone. The colonel beheld his sorrows with commiseration,

pitying

pitying his deep-rooted melancholy, which was more affecting from his youth ; for, though old apparently in misfortune, he was young in years, being yet under age, as he informed Montrose, and likewise that he was the only son of the Earl of Darlinton.

Every possible precaution was taken by the colonel to conceal from his daughter the danger he had encountered, which made him consequently not visit her till nearly recovered. Fortunately she attributed not seeing him as usual, to his having remained a longer time from Toulouse than had been his first intention ; and this caused her to be quite easy respecting him. In this interval Lord Henry sought his society, passing most of his hours in his company ; for, though considerably his senior, he contracted a great esteem for him, as his manners were perfectly agreeable, gaining him the  
attachment



attachment of most young people, of whose follies he became not the rigid censor, but viewed them with indulgence, notwithstanding he had always been a shining example of virtue. But it was, however, with uneasiness that Ermina viewed the alteration illness had occasioned in his personal appearance; and, regarding him with the most anxious expression of tenderness, she ejaculated, "You have been ill, my father. Ah! why did you (and a tear trembled in her eye) conceal it from me?" Colonel Montrose finding it impossible to deny it entirely, confessed that he had been confined by a slight indisposition which, as it was very trifling, he had not acquainted her with, from the fear of alarming her. This quieted her apprehensions, but had she known of his disagreeable adventure, she would have felt miserable for his safety, imagining the ruffians who attacked him were assassins, hired per-  
haps

haps, by his implacable enemy, Lord Belvidere, who might have discovered and wished to destroy him, and who, though they had failed in their first attempt, would most probably repeat it a second time ; but Colonel Montrose was himself of opinion that they were robbers, rather than hired assassins, and endeavoured, with success, to divert her thoughts from the subject of his late illness, as he assured her likewise, he experienced no other inconvenience from it than a languor, which is usually felt after indisposition.

Ermina was seated one morning in the refectoire conversing with sister Madelaine, while she assisted her in working at some artificial flowers (which the nuns amused themselves in making, and invented several other ingenious works which they disposed of to strangers, for the benefit of their community), when a

lay sister entered to inform her, the colonel waited to see her in the parlour. With alacrity she obeyed the agreeable summons, but started at finding him accompanied by a stranger. This stranger, who was indeed no other than Lord Henry Beauchamp, looked confused and agitated at seeing her, and his voice faltered as he addressed her with the usual forms of politeness. This, however, passed unobserved by her father, who was eagerly introducing him to his daughter as a gentleman to whom he owed the highest obligations. Ermina observed his confusion, which was quite an enigma to her, and too evident to escape her notice; but by degrees it subsided, and she was then as much charmed with his manners as with his appearance. She thought him learned without pedantry, sensible without affectation, and animated and witty without being frivolous or a coxcomb; and she admired him

him mostly for being not the least vain of his person (as handsome men in general are), but apparently unconscious of possessing more beauty than what falls to the usual lot of the male part of the creation. The moments flew rapidly away in the most delightful converse, unheeded by any of the parties, till the bell for prayers announced to Colonel Montrose and Lord Henry their having prolonged their visit to an unconfcionable length.

When Ermina was left alone, she endeavoured to discover a reason for the strange behaviour of her father's friend at the commencement of his visit; but she tortured her imagination with vain conjectures, nor could she fix on any one that wore the appearance of probability. At last she teased herself with the thought, that it was perhaps her nun's habit that astonished him, as he was but lately arrived in France, and might not have be-



fore seen what must appear to him a very strange dress. His politeness, she supposed, made him endeavour to conceal his surprize, which redoubled probably the awkwardness of his sensations ; for she could account for his conduct in no other manner. Cherishing this idea, Ermina, who, unknown to herself, wished to appear pleasing in the eyes of the handsome and charming Lord Henry, became for the first time dissatisfied with her habit, as she had too trifling an opinion of her own person, to imagine that she never looked more beautiful and interesting than when thus attired, as its simplicity shewed the little aid she required from ornament, but would certainly not have been favourable to a plain woman.

Lord Henry's visits at the convent were very frequent after his first introduction ; and each succeeding time that she was in his society, he improved in her opinion.

With

With the finest and most cultivated understanding in the world, he possessed an extraordinary vivacity, and wit amusing in the highest degree, but not tinged with the least ill-nature, as he never wounded the feelings of any one to display his own abilities, except when it was an object that from vice or folly really merited the lash of satire : he had likewise a taste for composing verses ; and as they grew more intimate, often gallantly presented her with pieces of poetry written in her praise, and with these lines, which he had addressed to her, she was particularly pleased :

TO ERMINA.

What is beauty ? 'Tis a flower,  
 Born to perish in an hour :  
 'Tis a shadow flying fleet  
 On the nimble courser's feet :  
 'Tis a creature of the spring,  
 Sporting on its wanton wing ;  
 Scarcely seen beneath the sun,  
 When its rapid race is run.

No, Ermina ! tho' thy eye  
 With the diamond's lustre vie ;  
 Tho' thy cheeks the bloom disclose  
 Of the lily and the rose ;  
 Tho' sweet smiles thy lips adorn,  
 Sweet as blushes of the morn ;  
 It is not these—it is thy truth,  
 That lures the love of every youth.

No, Ermina ! tho' our sight  
 Gaze a moment with delight ;  
 Think not that the soul is caught  
 By a thing so vain and nought ;  
 'Tis the graces of the mind,  
 Not to time or space confin'd,  
 That we ever fond admire,  
 That we ardently desire.  
 It is thy soft and tender heart—  
 It is thy ease devoid of art.

So much pleasure did the delicate attentions and conversation of Lord Henry give Ermina, that her former pursuits lost their charms; and much as she had before valued them, now appeared monotonous and trifling. Her present feelings she felt ashamed of mentioning to Sister Madelaine,

delaine, though hitherto accustomed to repose confidence in her friendly bosom; but the fear of drawing on herself the imputation of inconsistency restrained her, and she resolved, by employing herself with avidity, to banish these new sensations that so cruelly invaded her once unruffled breast. But vain were her exertions; her disordered fancy representing that the period was arrived which her father had predicted, when she would sigh for the world and grow weary of the monotony of a secluded life. Madelaine beheld with concern and compassion this evident change in her beloved Ermina's manners; and though unable to divine the cause, endeavoured by the tenderest attention to restore her cheerfulness; but her kind efforts had little effect, as her melancholy evidently increased every day.

To describe the varied emotions of pain, pleasure, and astonishment, which raised



a mingled conflict in the bosom of Lord Henry, when he unexpectedly beheld, in the daughter of Colonel Montrose, the beautiful recluse who had captivated his heart, requires an abler pen than mine to faithfully depict. With a numerous concourse of spectators, he had attended in the chapel of St. Catherine's to view the ceremony of Ermina's entering into her noviciate, his curiosity being raised by the report of her singular beauty, which had engrossed much conversation at Toulouse. It is not therefore wonderful, that, with a disposition strongly tinged with romance, the interesting situation of the beautiful Montrose should make a deep impression on his mind, as he was at that age when it is most susceptible; and the impossibility of success to his passion, as she appeared irrevocably devoted to a cloister, increased rather than diminished it: for human nature is so unaccountable, that opposition to any views that men  
form,

form, often makes them more desirous of their attainment.

The avenues to the convent were too well guarded for him to procure any intelligence the least satisfactory relating to her, though his attempts were as numerous as his efforts were unsuccessful. His continual disappointments did not, however, render him less obstinate in nourishing his ill-founded passion with a thousand vague and visionary hopes. One moment planning various schemes to gain her affection; and the next instant flattering himself, that independent of any knowledge of him, she might perhaps lose her inclination for a cloister before her noviciate was expired. Yet week rolled after week with no advancement in his wishes, whilst the ideal dreams of happiness that hitherto floated in his imagination faded away, leaving the cruel certainty of the impossibility of his ever gratifying

gratifying his affection by an union with his beloved recluse, and despondency the most gloomy had seized entire possession of his soul, when his fortunate rencontre with Colonel Montrose aroused his thoughts from their accustomed despairing channel; but it was only to return with redoubled violence to his usual deep-rooted melancholy.

Imagine then how indescribable must be his feelings, when in this distracted state of mind, at beholding in the daughter of his friend the woman he adored, and this friend, though so lately acquired, in his opinion estimable in the highest degree. How fallacious are thy most flattering prospects, deceitful hope! for scarcely had Beauchamp indulged the pleasing ideas thou suggestedst at this discovery, than every promised joy was destroyed, ere it had blossomed, by the information he received from Colonel Montrose of Ermina's  
un-

unalterable predilection and attachment to a secluded life. His heart was wrung with unutterable anguish mixed with innumerable distracted thoughts; and wretched, disappointed, he formed the hasty resolution of quitting France—then hesitated, resolving to unbosom himself to his friend, and intreat him to persuade her to accept him as a lover. But renovated hope forbade his pursuing the first plan, and the latter a nice sense of honour and delicacy prevented, as it would appear as if he estimated too highly the service he had rendered his friend; nor could he have the vanity to imagine his wishes would have more influence with Ermina than those of a father to whom she was tenderly and dutifully attached.

For some time he continued master of himself, but afterwards becoming daily more miserable, having made many reflections and a thousand resolutions which



were rejected as soon as formed, he could no longer resist unbosoming himself to her, to implore her compassion, for he thought he read in her soft eyes that his attentions were far from being disagreeable. As the novices never received any letters without the perusal of the abbess, he had a short consultation with his servant Antoine on the best method of conveying a letter to Miss Montrose, unknown to her; and he quitted his master, promising to use the utmost celerity in bringing him the necessary intelligence.

Immediately on Antoine's having left him, Lord Henry, in an inexpressible agitation of spirits, began a letter to Ermina. It commenced with an explanation of the birth of his passion, the confusion he experienced at seeing her as the daughter of Montrose, the augmentation of his love at every subsequent interview, painting the ardour of his passion in the  
 most

most moving terms, and concluding with a confession of his unspeakable agony at the idea of her being immured for life in the monastery of St. Catherine's. It was some time before he could compose such a letter as he wished, and even when he thought he had succeeded the best, he became dissatisfied. He eagerly demanded of Antoine on his return, what success he had met with, "Good news, mi Lor," exclaimed Antoine; "de Touriere at St. Catherine's is sister to a sweetheart of mine, who was waiting-maid to Mademoiselle Ermina, and has often talked to me of her belle maitresse, saying she is too pretty to be a religieuse. Le Colonel Montrose gives her a little pension till mademoiselle takes the veil, as she is to wait on her lady again (who is very fond of her), if she loses her relish for a cloister. Terefe, mi Lor, is a jolie fille, but no matter for that, I told her I should bring her your letter, and she promised

to

to convey it, with fidelity, to Mademoiselle Ermina, unknown to the Superior. Dat instant dat I found, mi Lor, you was amoureuse of de beautiful lady, I flew immediately to de Touriere, to tell her I wish to speak to her sister Terefe, and I hope you are satisfied?" "Truly so, my good fellow," replied Lord Henry, whilst he put a louis-d'or in his hand to reward his diligence. Antoine, after a thousand acknowledging bows, capered out of the room, his natural hilarity heightened by finding he had pleased his master, to whom he was faithfully attached.

Lord Henry, though charmed with having succeeded in the commencement of his plan, suffered, during the remainder of the day, all the tortures of suspense, as his letter was dispatched to Ermina. At night he slept but little; his dreams, occasioned by the tumult of his disordered fancy, being such as rendered him

him restless and uneasy. The next morning he arose fatigued and unrefreshed from the agitation his mind had undergone, and he paced his apartment oppressed with melancholy. He summoned Antoine to question him at what time he expected Terese, and had scarcely dismissed him, when he was again recalled to have the same enquiry repeated, till the poor valet wished this love at the diable, since he feared it had deranged his master's understanding. In this unpleasant state of hope and fear, which continued to agitate the breast of Lord Henry, Colonel Montrose called to request he would accompany him to St. Catherine's; but as he found he had not resolution to encounter seeing her till his fate was decided, he excused himself on the plea of indisposition.

Evening soon closed in after the colonel had left him, and worn out with  
anxious



anxious and disappointed expectation, he was sinking into the deepest despondency, dreading lest Ermina was offended at his presumption, when, as he leant pensively on the table, the sound of Antoine's voice, talking in very lively accents to some female, aroused his attention. They approached the door, and Antoine entered, conducting a sprightly-looking brown girl about the age of one and twenty, as Terefe. Lord Henry viewed her with more delight than if she had been mistress of the universe, as she presented a letter to him, which he eagerly received, and tearing it hastily open, read the subsequent lines :

“ Why attempt to seduce me to a world which even a father's wishes make me reluctant to re-enter? If your attachment is sincere, I feelingly regret it, and esteem you so much that I fervently hope you may place your affections on some worthier

thier

thier female, unfettered by vows or engagements of any description, and more deserving of you than

ERMINA MONTROSE.

“ I entreat you will oblige me by writing no more. It is, indeed, inconsistent with my profession to hear of love. Nor should I have answered your letter, had I not imbibed too high an opinion of my father’s friend to imagine he will construe it into encouragement.”

Lord Henry felt hope, though not unmixed with fear, steal into his bosom as he read this laconic epistle : as, from the esteem she had ventured to express for him, he flattered himself, could she, without appearing capricious, disengage herself from making her final vows, he might expect to be favorably received. Enveloped in the pleasing reflections this idea suggested, he had nearly forgotten that

that Antoine and Terefe were waiting his further commands.

Recollecting himself, he said to the latter, "I thank you, my good girl, for the trouble you have taken, and do me the favour to accept this trifle as a compensation." Terefe made Lord Henry a curtsy, saying at the same time, "You must pardon me, monsieur, for I cannot help saying, what a charming pair my lady and yourself would make, you are both so good, so generous, and handsome. To be sure, Mademoiselle Ermina was displeased with me for bringing her a letter secretly, and such a sweet colour mounted into her face as she read it ; but I believe, though she did not think it right to have it appear so, it was more with pleasure than anger, and I hope soon to see her out of the walls of that dismal convent." Lord Henry's eyes glistened with delight at this intelligence, which increased

creased the hopes that had revived in his bosom, whilst the praises Terefe bestowed on her he loved, heightened his affection. Some more conversation passed between him and the waiting-maid, whose naïveté amused him. She then took her leave, charmed with the affability of her young lady's lover, and resounding his praise to Antoine, who echoed her approbation.



## CHAPTER VI.

" Mild is the stroke of death itself,  
 " Compar'd to that which parts  
 " The seldom well-concerted bands  
 " Of love-united hearts."

HAMPDEN PYE.

**E**RMINA, as she perused Lord Henry's letter, felt a thousand emotions of pleasure at the knowledge of being beloved by him ; but these agreeable sensations vanished, when reflection told her how incompatible with the sentiments she so lately avowed, was her returning his attachment. Overwhelmed with sorrow and mortification, she wrote the note already described, giving it to Terefe to deliver ; and oppressed with melancholy, directed her steps to Madelaine's cell, expecting relief in her consolatory conversation,

sation, though a false shame rendered her averse to impart the cause of her uneasiness, notwithstanding she had lately confessed to her that she was unhappy. Disappointed at not finding the good sister there, and learning she was in the garden, she hastened to join her, passing swiftly through the cloisters, and had just reached the entrance to the garden, when she started at being addressed by the Superior and Father Eustache. So much was she absorbed in her own sorrowful reflections, that they would have passed unobserved by her, had not Eustache said, "Good-morrow to you, my fair sister," giving her at the same time his benediction. "I fear," continued he, speaking to the Superior, and regarding Ermina with an air of surprise, "that you suffer this poor child to be too strict in her devotions, for she looks pale and thin." This observation caused a conscious glow to mantle Ermina's cheek, as she knew too well that

that it was her late internal agitations that caused her ill health, and an unbidden tear, similar to the liquid pearl, trembled in her eye, whilst she perceived the Superior and Father Eustache viewing her with looks of benevolent compassion.

With a tremulous voice she evaded the discourse, and as they happily did not continue much longer conversing with her, being engaged in settling some business of importance relating to the convent, she eagerly flew to her dear Madeline, who was surprised at the more than usual melancholy expression of her countenance. Delicacy prevented her from enquiring the cause, but by conversing on those subjects most pleasing and interesting to Ermina's feelings, she endeavoured to lead her mind from dwelling on unpleasant retrospections. Her soothing attentions infused so sweet a calm on Ermina's spirits,

spirits, that she almost wondered how she could ever be sad in her society. When they again separated, and she had retired alone to her cell, she began a severe revival of her conduct, resolving, as an atonement for what she deemed her past folly, to banish the idea of Lord Henry from her breast, except she could consider him only as her father's friend, from the well-founded apprehension that her growing regard might take such deep root as to endanger the happiness of her future life. For she dreaded lest his image should be so firmly impressed on her heart, as to cause the sacrifice of her tranquillity, which made the chief felicity in the secluded life to which she had destined herself. In pursuance of the resolution she had formed, she became every day more indefatigable in the duties of her profession, and was quoted as an example to all the young novices.

The



The Superior could not avoid mentioning her exemplary piety to the colonel, thinking it would give him pleasure ; but she was mistaken, as it had a contrary effect, and overwhelmed him with a despondence that stole away the little hope that remained to cheer his drooping spirits. Beauchamp, independent of sympathy for his friend, was distracted with his own misery. His despair augmented at every interview, as the indifference with which she conducted herself towards him, and talked of renouncing the world, wore so easy and natural an appearance, that it was impossible to suspect it assumed, or imagine the inward struggles she suffered. Yet, although wounded to the quick by a conduct it was impossible to blame, severe as were his sufferings, he had not, however, resolution to debar himself of the pleasure of seeing her, and continued to accompany Montrose in his visits to his daughter, thus inconsiderately strength-

strengthening a passion, reason and prudence told him to forget. Ermina, very differently from him, had made repeated efforts to subdue her dawning regard, and thought she had met with the success her virtuous struggles certainly merited, in obliterating Lord Henry from her heart; and, as the time approached for her final renunciation of the world, felt her fortitude rather increase than diminish. This heroism continued to support her till within a week of the expiration of her noviciate, when her firmness weakened at observing the dejected, despairing looks of Lord Henry, and the pallid countenance of her father, who apparently laboured under greater indisposition than he chose to declare, which often caused her to weep in her solitary cell the fatal predilection she had imbibed for a cloister. Madelaine perceived with anguish the conflict in her mind, and, suspecting the cause, persuaded her, but in

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vain, to unbosom herself to Lord Henry ; but ineffectual were her persuasions, while her parental tenderness soothed the misery and despair of the unhappy Ermina.

One night, after an interview with her father and Lord Henry, she would not retire to rest, but passed the hours in tears till the bell summoned her to mattins more dead than alive. When she had finished her devotions, she returned to her cell somewhat composed, and passed another hour more in prayer, to fortify her heart. She then sat pensively musing on her misfortunes till interrupted by a nun, who came to announce to her that a gentleman from Colonel Montrose wished to speak with her immediately. Surprised at receiving a message from him at so late an hour, she hastily bathed her eyes with rose water, as they bore evident traces of the tears she had shed, and descended to the parlour, where she started at perceiving  
the

the gentleman waiting for her was Lord Henry. With a grave and melancholy air, and a voice softened by affliction, he thus addressed her: "I am grieved to be the messenger of sorrow, but cannot conceal from you that your father is dangerously ill, and wishes instantly to see you." Ermina's weakened spirits could not bear this dreadful intelligence, and she fainted in his arms: the Superior, who was present, aided by Lord Henry, soon restored her to her senses, by rubbing her temples with hartshorn, and making her drink, when she was a little recovered, some wine and water.

When she was somewhat tranquillized, she insisted that they would suffer her to go to her father without delay. Finding her so very positive, they complied, and Lord Henry assisted her to his carriage, which was in waiting, jumped in after her, and it instantly drove off. During their ride, Ermina was several times so

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faint



faint from the agitation she had suffered, that he was obliged to support her in his arms, or she would have fallen to the bottom of the carriage, being violently affected with sorrow at the dangerous state to which her father was reduced. A constant silence was preserved between Lord Henry and herself, interrupted only by their mutual sighs; and, when they alighted, and she had staid a few minutes below to recover herself, and resume her fortitude, he conducted her in the same silence to the apartment of Colonel Montrose, and then withdrew. Trembling, she approached the bed of her beloved parent, on whose emaciated countenance a smile faintly shone at the sight of her; but it soon vanished, and he looked at her with an expression of sorrow. Ermina, agitated with the most painful sensations from not knowing what to dread, could not disguise her emotions, and, throwing herself on her knees by his bed-side, exclaimed,

claimed, "Is your Ermina, my father, no longer beloved by you? must she be a sharer only in your happiness, and have no participation in the grief that has caused, I fear, your indisposition? Alas! will you suffer a child, who owes so much to your tenderness, to remain a stranger to the sorrow which her affectionate attention might alleviate?"

Unutterably affected, Colonel Montrose strove to console her by repeated asseverations that she had no reason to be alarmed at his illness; but when he had succeeded in composing her mind, he imparted to her, that it was in reality in consequence of her resolution of taking the veil, that his health had been affected. Overwhelmed with horror and remorse that she should, though innocently, have caused the disorder which preyed upon his vital frame, she promised, on her knees, to entirely relinquish a monastic life, and to ex-

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piate her unintentional fault by passing the remainder of her days with him. This eager, and voluntary acquiescence to his wishes composed her father's mind ; and, though the fever occasioned by the agitation of his spirits, raged with terrifying violence, it soon abated, and hopes began to be entertained of his recovery. Ermina watched by him every night till the paroxysm of his disorder was past, administered his medicines with her own hand, only snatching a few hours of repose in the day. She had, however, the pleasure of witnessing the reward of her care and attention, by observing him mend by slow degrees. Lord Henry was constant in his enquiry after the health of Colonel Montrose, yet dared not venture a personal interview with him, from the fear of seeing Ermina, as she was so soon to take the veil, which had extinguished all hope in his disconsolate bosom, and gave him pain to see her ; for he was un-  
acquainted

acquainted with the change wrought in her situation, concluding she only remained with her father till his health was established. The accounts he received from the attendants, of the unwearied attention she paid her father, to the endangering of her own health, increased his admiration, and filled his heart with fresh wounds.

When the health of Colonel Montrose permitted Ermina to give a thought on any other subject, she wrote the Superior of St. Catherine's an account of the necessity she was under, of declining to take the veil; regretting at the same time, very affectionately, the loss she should sustain by being deprived of her's, and the good Madelaine's society. To this letter Ermina received an answer, wherein the good Superior spoke with the highest approbation of her conduct, requesting to have the happiness of seeing her as soon

as she could quit her father ; and that she would likewise do her the invaluable favour of having her portrait drawn for herself and Madelaine, dressed in the character of St. Catherine, the tutelary saint of the convent. The Superior concluded with entreating she would often visit them, as it would be the highest gratification they could receive. Ermina, charmed with her goodness, wrote again, to say, how much she was flattered by her affectionate attention, and that she should instantly comply with her request respecting the picture.

Lord Henry, when he learnt from the colonel of the change in Ermina's situation, felt as if reprieved from death, and blessed her father's illness as a source of happiness to them all ; for in her soft eyes he could not avoid reading that he was not displeasing to her, and hoped, from time and assiduity, to render himself worthy of attaining her hand.

CHAP-

## CHAPTER VII.

“ But vainly here we hope that bliss,

“ Unfading, shall endure—

“ Ah! in a world so vain as this,

“ What heart can rest secure?”

WILLIAMS.

ERMINA had passed a day at St. Catherine's, and, on her return home in the evening, found an unexpected visitor in conversation with her father. This personage was the Count de Valcour, who, being obliged to return to Toulouse on indispensable business, had called at Monsieur du Bourg's, where he was informed of the recent danger of Colonel Montrose, and the altered situation of his daughter. He hastened immediately to pay his respects to them, and enlivened



by the renewal of hope, his spirits were at their height, and he contrived to amuse the colonel so agreeably in Ermina's absence, that he was easily prevailed on to accept an invitation he gave him to pass some time at his chateau, which was situated in the most healthful and beautiful part of the south of France. The change of air, Montrose flattered himself, would contribute to the entire restoration of his health, and de Valcour learning from him that Lord Henry Beauchamp (whom he frequently mentioned) was his particular friend, included him likewise in the invitation, naturally imagining it would please the former. The proposed visit gave much pleasure to Ermina, who was of the same opinion as her father, in thinking it would be of service to him, and, at all events, be more beneficial to his constitution than directly encountering, after his dangerous illness, the variable changes of a British sky.

Ermina's

Ermina's portrait had been finished and conveyed to St. Catherine's before she went, with a heavy heart, to bid adieu to its beloved inhabitants; she was much affected as she entered the refectoire, at beholding her worthy friend sister Madelaine gazing at her picture, which was placed there, with eyes suffused in tears. She folded Ermina to her bosom, and, pointing to the portrait, exclaimed, "How beautiful it looks, my child! but I shall lose the happiness of contemplating the goodness of its original, and know not how to console myself for the loss of so much sweetness." At these flattering encomiums Ermina blushed, and said she was too partial to her. Madelaine entreated she would write frequently, which she promised faithfully to observe, as it would likewise be the highest gratification to herself to receive her advice, and hear of her welfare. Father Eustache, who had heard of her coming to take a

final leave of the sisterhood, paid a visit that day to the convent on purpose to see her. With difficulty he concealed his painful emotions at beholding her, most probably for the last time; but, when with a faltering voice he said "Farewel, my sweet and gentle friend," a tear reluctant fell, and he bowed upon her hand in silent grief. Ermina perceived it, and was affected; and when, in a voice scarcely articulate, he intreated should she ever return to France again, to inform him, and he would willingly walk an hundred leagues to see her, she melted into tears. The whole community, by whom she was universally beloved, crowded round her to express their regret at losing her. In the most grateful terms she expressed her thanks for their kindness and affection, distributing various little presents to each of them, which she knew would be acceptable as a trifling remembrance of herself, promising, at the same

same time, to prevail on Colonel Montrose to permit her (if it was possible) to visit them once more before she returned to England. When the moment arrived for her to quit them, she wept for several minutes in Madelaine's arms, and, after a thousand demonstrations of friendship, affection, and regret, from the whole society, with indescribable emotions and a dejected heart, she threw herself into the carriage, taking, with tearful eyes, a last look of St. Catherine's venerable walls, the abode of innocent gaiety and peace, and whose valued inhabitants would never be effaced from her memory.

The following morning de Valcour, accompanied by Colonel Montrose, Ermina, and Lord Henry Beauchamp, departed in a post coach for the chateau. Another carriage followed them with some of the count's suite, with Antoine and Terese. De Valcour, when introduced



duced to Lord Henry, half repented of his politeness in giving him an invitation, as the singular grace and beauty of his person, and elegance of his manners, made him fear a rival in his favourite views; though, from the guarded conduct of the lovers, it was impossible to suspect that a warmer sentiment than friendship pervaded either Henry's or Ermina's bosom. The journey in which this little party was engaged, met with no unpleasant interruption; and, as they travelled by easy stages, they enjoyed the fine picturesque views of the country through which they passed. On the evening of the fourth day they arrived within a mile of the Chateau, entering a long avenue of trees which reached to it. The year was on the decline, the road strewn with faded leaves, and the last gleam of sunshine wore away on the tops of the hills, the solemn colouring of night beginning to spread over the extensive  
woods.

woods which encircled this spot, whilst through their lofty branches the wind gloomily whistled. The whole scene was calculated to inspire the mind with melancholy ideas, nor could the polite assiduity of Lord Henry, or the more pointed attentions of de Valcour, prevent a pensive sadness from stealing over Ermina. She looked at her father's emaciated countenance till the tear of apprehensive affection started in her eye; but she wiped it hastily away lest he should perceive it.

With spirits thus painfully depressed, Ermina entered the chateau, nor was the gloomy antiquity of its air, or massy iron gates, which grated on their hinges as opened to receive them, in the least formed to banish melancholy, and she felt an unaccountable presentiment of some evil that was to befall her. But she reproached herself for giving way to such  
weak

weak ideas, and looked at de Valcour, in whose countenance joy shone conspicuous, as he welcomed his valuable guests, to whom he studied to render every thing so agreeable that it was impossible to avoid being pleased. It even dispersed Ermina's sadness, who flattered herself, as her spirits returned, that the change of air, and the quietude that reigned around the chateau, would contribute to her father's perfect recovery. At supper the count introduced them to Father Anselmo, a monk, his friend and confessor. Ermina felt something repugnant to her feelings in his appearance; for though his fallow countenance was always dressed in smiles, yet under those smiles she fancied lurked cruelty and deceit. His fawning manners likewise disgusted her, yet she blamed herself for judging so severely of a perfect stranger, and endeavoured to conquer her antipathy, but all her efforts were ineffectual.

She

She awoke early the next morning, and as none of the family were yet moving, placed herself near the casement, contemplating the prospect from it, which was pleasing, though bounded. Flora now displayed few of her charms, as wintry blasts began already to chill her beauties; but Ermina still found something to admire, and particularly the scarlet fruit of the arbutus, which blushed beneath its emerald-green leaves, the snowy clusters of the lauristinus lightly tinged with pink, with various other shrubs that still remained to charm the eye. The deer were ranging amongst the tall trees that encompassed that part of the building where she slept, and as she was partial to a great deal of wood, was pleased with the present view, which offered a luxuriant variety of foliage.—The venerable appearance of some of the trees attracted her notice, and beneath their leafy coverts, the warbling of numerous



merous birds attuned her soul to harmonious sensations, whilst through the branches of the lofty chestnuts she frequently perceived the frolicksome squirrels gaily skipping. After amusing herself some time in observing them, she took up a book, and beguiled the hours till, hearing the sound of voices and footsteps in the chateau, she descended to the saloon, where she found de Valcour, her father, and Lord Henry, waiting breakfast. Ermina's fancy coinciding with her wishes, she imagined her beloved parent looked better than usual, and this idea gave her a flow of spirits that animated the whole party, to whom she was infinitely dear.

Early in the evening, the sons and daughters of de Valcour's tenants, preceded by a band of music, entered the lawn opposite the chateau to celebrate his arrival; and, having chanted a song appli-

applicable to the occasion, arranged themselves in order to perform a dance. The sound of the instruments, and the gaiety of the peasants, were inspiring, and the count seizing Ermina's hand, asked her with a smile to make one in the festive group. To this request she cheerfully assented, and, immediately joining the party on the lawn, they danced several dances together, when de Valcour resigned her to Lord Henry, taking for his partner a pretty country girl. Colonel Montrose, pleased at beholding his daughter's returning vivacity, placed himself at the foot of a shady oak; and, as it was remarkably warm for the season, enjoyed the cool breezes which were wafted sweetly around by the sportive zephyrs, while the music stole gently on the ear of the evening. They continued dancing till the moon arose and shed a pale luminous light on this sweet scene of rural happiness, and tinged the deep green woods and antique

tique turrets of the chateau with a silver lustre.

Ermina, tired with dancing, seated herself on the grass, and Lord Henry and de Valcour placed themselves beside her: "How sweetly," exclaimed the former, "does the reflection of the moon-beams illumine each surrounding object with mellowed brightness!" "It is on such lovely nights as these," replied Ermina, "that methinks those I love are most dear to me, whilst I feel a painful, yet pleasing melancholy in reflecting, that as I contemplate the moon which diffuses its silver light around me, its pale orb shines likewise perhaps on the objects of my affection." "Were I a lover," continued the Count, "this is the moment I should choose to create an interest in my fair one's bosom, as the sweetness of the scene must betray her feelings into a softness favourable to sensations of pity." As he pronounced

nounced these words, his fine black eyes glanced expressively at Ermina, and Lord Henry stole a look which brought a blush into her cheeks. To prevent a continuation of this conversation, which confused her, she asked the latter to borrow a flageolet of one of the peasants, and play her an air which he had composed himself. He complied with this request, and Ermina accompanied him with her voice. The words were these :

Soft is the breath of ev'ning gales,  
Which odours from the vi'let steal;  
Soft is the voice of nightingales;  
But softer is the love I feel.

Pure as the dew-drop from the rose,  
Is love when founded on esteem;  
Pure as the dove that haunts the grove;  
Pure as the thoughts which infants dream:

Nor time, nor absence, can subdue  
This tender and unvarying flame;  
From earliest youth 'twas fix'd on you,  
O Ella! take the heart you claim.

The



The day had been very warm, and the dews beginning to fall heavily, they all adjourned to the chateau. The tenants were soon after dismissed with each a sum of money, which the count generously bestowed on them, and which was sufficient to make them happy for a month at least. Grateful they poured forth endless blessings on their benefactor, and departed with repeated wishes for his future happiness.

Fortunate would it be for mankind, if the rich and great studied like de Valcour the happiness of their inferiors in fortune, instead of lavishing their money in trifles and ostentatious charities. Ah! did they but know the pleasures that spring from true benevolence, never would they lose the enjoyment it bestows. Ermina, enlivened by the pleasing scene she had witnessed, which had soothed and amused  
her

her mind, retired happy to rest, and soon sunk into a sweet refreshing slumber.

De Valcour, who never relaxed in attention to his guests, contrived every day to find some new amusement, which gave almost an endless variety to their pleasures; and this animated party had been three weeks together at the chateau, which had passed on such silken wings that it appeared but as one. In this happy interval Lord Henry had again offered himself to Ermina, who, with the sanction of her father, had accepted his addresses, promising to give him her hand when he received from the Earl of Darlington an approbation of his conduct, and a consent for him to unite himself to her. De Valcour was not long unacquainted with the mutual affection of Lord Henry and Miss Montrose, and even their engagement was at length mentioned to him in confidence by the colonel, which discouraged him  
from

from making any farther overtures to her ; but the sight of their happiness was painful to him, though he concealed his feelings under an appearance of gaiety.

But perfect felicity is of short duration in this world of sorrow, and that of our lovers was interrupted by a summons Lord Henry received from England, demanding his immediate return, as his father was seized with a dangerous illness which threatened his life. Overwhelmed with affliction at the excruciating thought of losing his parent, and quitting his beloved Ermina, he was a prey to the most cruel emotions. The anguish of parting was indeed somewhat softened by the expectation of soon meeting again, Colonel Montrose promising, as he was almost recovered, to shortly leave France. And he had likewise another consolation in the permission Ermina granted him to correspond frequently with her. Yet, with all these alleviations,

leviations, to be separated from her he loved more than life, was insupportable; but duty and affection to his father forbade his stay.

To take a personal leave of his dear and valued Ermina and her father, he found he had not resolution, and, to prevent the pangs it would cost both them and himself, he arose before day-break, having ordered his servants and carriage (the last evening) to wait for him at the end of the avenue. To de Valcour he had previously, and in secret, made his acknowledgments for his politeness and hospitality, recommending at the same time his beloved and estimable friends to his care. All was now faint light, for morn had scarcely begun to dawn on the distant hills, when Lord Henry's eyes sought, as he passed down the avenue, the casements of Ermina's apartment, and gave a sigh as he viewed them; reflecting what a length of time



must necessarily elapse ere they should meet again. A cold shiver came over him when he could no longer distinguish the casements, and his eyes were dimmed with tears as he entered the carriage, which he endeavoured to attribute, ashamed of his weakness, to the cold air of the morning. But he could not shake off an uncommon depression of spirits, which he feared presaged some misfortune either to himself, or (who was dearer to him) his innocent and beauteous Ermina. These apprehensions, however, which he considered as womanish, were dissipated before he reached Calais, whence he wrote to her in very good spirits. Antoine, who was as much in love as his master, participated for a short time in his melancholy ; but he was a Frenchman, his grief was consequently of short duration, and, viewing the agreeable side of the picture, he thought only of the pleasure he should have in seeing his dear Terefe again.

Ermina

Ermina was ignorant of her loss till she attended the breakfast table, when, observing the vacant place, she burst into tears, and retreated to her own room, where she indulged her sorrow for some hours. Montrose suffered her grief to be unmolested, thinking it best to let it exhaust itself, and trusting to her good sense for the prevention of immoderately giving way to it. In this conjecture he was not mistaken: for when reason restored her recollection, she suppressed her tears, and went to pay her respects to her father, whom she found evidently depressed, as well as herself, at the loss of Lord Henry's society, whose conversation and manners were so well calculated to please and entertain. Neither had they any one acquaintance or friend, who could compensate for the deprivation they had sustained, as the count, though animated and polite, wanted the talents of Lord Henry; and his vivacity frequently degenerated

into a buffoonery that fatigued the spirits. Father Anselmo was sometimes of their parties ; but his discourse consisted either of insipid flattery, or else of gloomy desponding subjects that inspired his auditors with melancholy : and Ermina, whose dislike to him did not lose on a more intimate acquaintance, dreaded his appearance. He easily perceived he was no favourite with her, as he had a great deal of penetration ; and the glances he sometimes gaye her from his yellow eye balls, were replete with venom and ill-nature, and would have alarmed her had she not been secure in the idea that he could do her no injury. De Valcour, who inwardly rejoiced at Lord Henry's absence, yet in appearance sympathised with Ermina and her father ; and the apparent openness of his character, which rendered him more dangerous, made it impossible for them to suspect he was such an adept in dissimulation.

CHAP.

## CHAPTER VIII.

" For where, beside the spangled brook,  
 " Yon poplars court the breeze ;  
 " Behold a little cot whose smoke  
 " Slow curls above the trees."

THELWALL.

**A**FTER the departure of Lord Henry, Ermina's favourite amusement was to steal a walk, when de Valcour and her father were engaged at chess (of which they were very fond), through the extensive woods and groves that environed the august and venerable chateau de Valcour. She delighted to wander beneath the foliage of the lofty trees, to gather the wild flowers scattered in her path; or, seated on the brown trunk of a fallen oak covered with moss and ivy, to lean pensively on her

F 3

arm,



arm, while she sang the most beautiful and plaintive airs: for her heart was oppressed with a melancholy that every day increased, nor could she define the cause of it, as it was not the absence of Lord Henry whom she soon hoped to meet again, and never thought of but with pleasure. Had she been superstitious, she would have considered it as a foreboding of misfortune, but on the contrary, she imputed it to weakness of spirits, which she exerted herself to overcome when alone, by writing, drawing, reading, or music. This, however, happened but seldom, as her father and de Valcour rarely suffered her to be absent from them for any length of time, except when engaged at their favourite game of chess.

She escaped from them one evening when they were thus amusing themselves, and strolled into the wood, where she indulged herself in thinking of Lord Henry,  
and

and her present walk reminded her of one she had taken with him. Absorbed in these reflections, she continued to walk forward till night drew on, its dusky shades darkening the surrounding objects; and, on attempting to return to the chateau, the dimness of the light made her mistake her way; and, crossing into a wrong path, she wandered she knew not whither. Alarmed at finding her perplexity increase, and terrified lest she should be bewildered in the wood, which reached to a great distance, she fancied a thousand dreadful things. Her disagreeable thoughts were only interrupted by the distant sound of a water-fall; and she imagined she heard distinctly, not far from her, the howlings of wolves, whilst the dismal scream of an owl, which often broke through the silence of night, heightened her terror almost to agony, and seemed as an omen of death. She found at last, that the path she had casually struck

into, was conducting her to the banks of a river fringed with coppice-wood ; and the moon now rising, cheered the scene, as its beams sparkled on the transparent water.

Ermina now felt her courage revive as she walked about a quarter of a mile farther, and admired, notwithstanding her fears, the silver brightness that was reflected around, and illustrated every object. She proceeded, anxiously wishing for the sight of a human habitation, when she suddenly discerned a light, apparently issuing from the windows of some dwelling, through a grove of poplars. She advanced eagerly towards it, and found herself near a cottage, to which she quickened her steps, and, looking through the casement whence the light came, beheld a beautiful young girl seated on a rustic bench, accompanying a guitar with her voice, while an old woman sat listening to her with great earnestness. Ermina remained  
in

in an attitude of attention as she sung, in English, the following verses :

With wreaths of roses once I bound my hair,  
 While round its ringlets gentle zephyrs play'd;  
 My wild wood-notes I warbl'd to the air,  
 Or danc'd untir'd within the myrtle shade;

When the bright sun in splendid pomp did rise,  
 To gild with orient beam each verdant dale,  
 With the fleet lark, which quivers as she flies,  
 I bath'd my footsteps in the dewy vale :

But now, no more my brows with roses crown'd;  
 For baleful cypress mingles with the day :  
 And, as I form'd this chaplet, sorrow drown'd  
 In tears of anguish ev'ry leaf and spray.

Through barren rocks and wilds I fighting stray,  
 The meadow's flow'ry paths no more to tread;  
 The blossom'd groves ill suit my mournful lay  
 To scenes of horror I'm for ever fled !

When she had finished singing, Ermina saw her wipe the tears from her eyes, and recline her head on her hand in an attitude of sorrow, forming altogether the most beautiful and interesting picture she had



ever beheld. But the distress of her own situation, and the alarm her absence must occasion at the chateau, would not permit her any longer to contemplate this lovely figure, so worthy the pencil of a painter, and she knocked gently at the door. It was cautiously opened by the old woman, who started back with evident surprise at a visitor so unusual. Ermina relieved her by relating, in as concise a manner as possible, how she had lost herself in the wood, intreating, at the same time her assistance, in procuring a person, whom she would willingly pay, to conduct her to the chateau de Valcour. The old woman, with the utmost civility, offered to accompany her there herself, saying she was perfectly acquainted with the road. Ermina thanked her, and, when she left her to fetch her cloak, addressed herself in French to the young girl whom she supposed her daughter. But picture her surprise at finding by her accent, and two or three words she inadvertently

advertently let fall, that she was a native of England, though the old woman was completely French.

Ermina was charmed with her conversation, which was refined and perfectly correct. She possessed grace without study, and nature's winning ease; her manners forming altogether a decided contrast to her coarse jacket of grey serge, and round-eared cap, which ill concealed the luxuriance of her bright chestnut-coloured tresses, which heightened the whiteness of her ivory skin. Never had Ermina conversed with any one more agreeable, and, had it been possible for her to have followed the dictates of her own inclination, she would have continued with her for some hours. Reluctantly she arose to depart (as she saw she detained the old cottager), saying to the fair stranger, she should again visit the cottage to thank both herself and mother for their attention.

tention. A deep blush crimsoned the lovely girl's cheeks at these words, and she replied in a tremulous voice, " May I intreat, madam, as a favour of the utmost consequence, that you will not mention to the Count de Valcour having visited this cottage, however strange this request may appear. But, believe me, the sweetness I observe in you, and the singular circumstance of your being conducted here, will induce me on our next interview to explain this apparent mystery, and repose a confidence which may excite your pity for a guilty and unfortunate being, unworthy as she is of your compassion." Ermina, affected with the melancholy earnestness of her manner, assured her she might depend on her secrecy; and that she should make her as early a visit as was consistent with the keeping of it. She then took her leave, overcome with surprise at this adventure, the whole affair appearing more like a dream than any thing in real life,

so

so superior was the lovely rustic to any one she had ever seen in so inferior a situation. The old woman, as she walked with Ermina, was very talkative, but did not once mention her daughter; and from motives of delicacy, her companion declined asking any questions. When they arrived within view of the turrets of the chateau, the aged cottager said she must take her leave, as she was afraid of being seen by some of the count's servants, and then repeated what the beauteous rustic had before urged, that Ermina would have the goodness not to give any information where she had been. The latter intreated her not to have any uneasy thoughts on the subject, offering her at the same time a gratuity for her trouble, which with the utmost difficulty she prevailed on her to accept.

On entering the chateau, Ermina learnt to her great joy that her absence had been unobserved,



unobserved, and no enquiry made after her, as de Valcour and the count concluded she was in her own chamber. Her impatience was great to visit the lovely peasant girl; but she was obliged to restrain it till the expiration of a fortnight, as she had no opportunity before that period of gratifying her inclinations undiscovered. Her father and de Valcour then went to pay a visit to a nobleman, whose seat was in the vicinity of the chateau, where they intended passing some days. Ermina had been asked to be of the party, but had refused, from an eagerness to gratify her curiosity respecting the fair rustic, and immediately after their departure, hastened (accompanied by Teresa) to the cottage, where she was received with smiles of pleasure and satisfaction, and where she had not been long seated before the lovely stranger communicated the following narrative of herself:

“ It

“It is nearly six months,” said Adeliza (for so this young stranger was named), “since I beheld Eugene, Count de Valcour, for the first time. I had attended my father and mother from England, my native country, to Montpellier, which place the latter visited for the recovery of her health, it having been for some months in so precarious a state as to threaten a consumption, if she neglected to seek a warmer climate. De Valcour arrived at that town about the same time as ourselves, and I often remarked him, as he walked past our lodgings regularly every day, for a very handsome, elegant young man, apparently devoured by some secret affliction, that had affected his health. His eyes were always inclined towards the ground, his face was pale, and he generally wore a large great coat, wrapped loosely about him, which gave him a more disordered and dejected air, and I could not avoid feeling the utmost

most pity for one thus a prey to sorrow in the bloom of life.

“ Having interested myself so much in his favour, you may suppose I was not very disagreeably surprised, when one evening at a ball, to which my mother had insisted I should go, Edward Ormond, my brother, came up to me, introducing the Count de Valcour, as a gentleman who wished to have the honour of being my partner. As I was disengaged, his request was granted, and the conversation that passed between us in the course of the evening, made us mutually pleased with each other. He danced with the greatest elegance, his melancholy appeared to be nearly fled, and he was animated and amusing. The following morning he called to enquire after my health, and from that period, his visits (being sanctioned by my parents) were very frequent, and his dejection entirely banished,

banished, although I rarely ever saw him alone; for in the absence of my honoured parents, my governess was with me, a most excellent woman, and whose good opinion he endeavoured to obtain by the most flattering attentions, while he professed himself my lover.

“ Scarcely sixteen, credulous from being unacquainted with the world, I listened, with too much pleasure and belief, to his professions; but my governess, who observed the precipice on which I stood, entreated, that before he had made an indelible impression on my heart, he would endeavour to gain my parents’ approbation of his conduct. But, alas! it was too late, I already loved him. He immediately offered himself to them as their son-in-law; but he found that, though partial to him as an agreeable companion and acquaintance, they were thoroughly averse to him as a husband for  
their



their daughter, not only from having destined me for the son of an old friend, and from the general opinion entertained of the libertinism of his character (though he glossed over his vices most speciously to us), but likewise from his being a foreigner, and a roman-catholic. I had been educated in the principles of the established church of England, and they considered it as the height of folly to think of uniting their child to a man with whom she could expect no permanent felicity, as his sentiments of virtue and religion were so different from hers. These considerations obliged them, in as delicate a manner as possible, to forbid his visits at our house.

“ He contrived, however, to convey letters to me, which were written in a pathetic style, that worked on the natural susceptibility of my heart, and raised so severe a conflict in my mind, betwixt love  
for

for him and duty to my parents, that I was attacked with a delirious fever, and my life despaired of. My tender and indulgent father and mother, excited by Edward, who was partial to de Valcour, and their own fondness for me, resolved, if it pleased the Almighty that I should recover, to unite me to the count, notwithstanding all their objections: for they plainly perceived the strength of my attachment, and that it was the only method to completely restore my health.

“The instant I got better, they sent for him, and in a few weeks the most magnificent preparations were made for our nuptials. My parents, though much against de Valcour’s inclination, insisted that Edward should accompany him to his uncle, the Baron d’Offat (who, since his father’s death, had shewn him the utmost tenderness and attention), to ask his approbation of the marriage, and to be present

present at the ceremony, as they thought it was a mark of respect he deserved.— There were likewise some papers relative to the marriage settlements, which it was necessary should be signed in the baron's presence. It was also fixed for my brother and the count to return from his uncle's early on the morning of our nuptials, which were to be performed at eleven o'clock.

“ When the day arrived, I waited the return of my lover and Edward in fluttering and anxious expectation. The appointed hour for their arrival (which was nine) passed away, and they did not appear. Heavily and sadly the succeeding hours moved on till three o'clock, and scarcely could I support myself, when the sound of a carriage, which drove furiously to the door, aroused me. Revived, I flew to the window; but figure to yourself my distraction at seeing only my brother alight.

alight. Almost senseless, I sunk into the arms of my mother, who was supporting me, when Edward entered with a hurried step, and a countenance pale and disordered. 'My poor Adeliza,' said he, in a voice of anguish, while the tears rolled down his manly cheek. I threw myself into his arms. 'Speak,' I exclaimed: 'is not my Eugene dead? I am convinced he is, Edward, or he would have been with his Adeliza. Oh! say what I dread to hear, for I expect every thing most horrid.' Harrowed with these dreadful ideas, I attended not to his reply, but shrieking violently, became wholly insensible.

"Several days elapsed ere I became conscious of any thing that passed around me; but when restored to reason, I entreated to be informed of the particulars relative to de Valcour's absence on our intended nuptial day. With the hope of  
calming



calming my mind, they consented to acquaint me with every circumstance, which was less dreadful than my terrified imagination had represented.

“ When Edward was introduced to the venerable Baron d’Offat, as the brother of de Valcour’s intended wife, he said that he instantly observed an expression of astonishment overspread his countenance, which he interpreted to be surprise at his nephew’s approaching marriage, as he had not been apprised of it before ; or, perhaps, at his marrying at all, as an engagement of that kind must be a confinement to a man of his levity. Edward remarked, at the same time, that the count wore an air of constraint, and appeared unusually depressed. The manners and conversation of the baron were uncommonly prepossessing, and the hospitality and politeness he evinced towards my brother, quite endeared him to him ;  
and

and the time glided away in the most pleasureable manner, until the evening previous to de Valcour's return to Montpelier, when my brother gently hinted to him, that it was necessary he should mention (as his sister's marriage was so near), that the settlements my parents had agreed should be made on me, were ready for him to sign in the presence of his uncle.

“ Motives of delicacy, Edward added, had occasioned hitherto his silence on the subject. De Valcour coldly assented to this proposition, and, as the former was in possession of the settlements, he placed them before him, and went in search of the baron to request his presence. They returned together, and found the count leaning on the table in a melancholy posture, examining the papers, which he said he perfectly approved. He then took up a pen, and was going to sign his  
name

name to them, when his uncle, with a grave voice, and stern aspect, said to him, 'But, Eugene, are you certain that your wife is dead?' At this question, the pen fell from his hand, the blood forsook his cheeks, and he sunk into a chair for a moment, oppressed with shame: then suddenly starting up, he rushed out of the room, leaving my brother too much overcome with surprise to think of detaining him. Astonishment, however, subsided, and Edward demanded of the baron an explanation of the scene that had passed; saying, likewise, that whatever mysterious circumstances there were for him to be acquainted with, he should have been informed of them before, and not left this horrid explanation to the last moment; as the shock must fall with increased violence on his sister's mind, from its occurring at an instant when she expected to be at the summit of happiness. All that he had described, the baron replied, he forcibly

forcibly felt, and should certainly, as a man of honour, have acquainted him with the circumstances relative to the count's marriage, had he not been assured by him that his wife was dead, and enjoined to keep secret his ever having married.— This request he had complied with, and should have continued to have done so, had not a gloominess, which he observed in his nephew, made his doubts return, and fixed him in the resolution of reviving the subject at a time when, if he was capable of remorse, it must overwhelm him with shame, confusion, and repentance. 'My scheme,' continued the baron to my brother, 'has had, as you have too fatally perceived, the desired effect; for at any other time it might not, perhaps, have created so much compunction in his breast, and induced him to continue the deception. You must likewise forgive me for pitying Eugene, as the woman to whom he is married is, of all others, the

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most disgusting ; and it was in a fit of intoxication that he was seduced, by her arts, to give her his hand.' ' I should feel sentiments of compassion for the count, as well as yourself,' Edward returned, ' had he not acted with so much duplicity, and practised the refinement of cruelty in seducing the affections of my sister, and rendering her miserable for life ; and he may be assured, that it is only my regard for her, and the dread of wounding her feelings through him, that I defer demanding instant satisfaction for the insult offered.' The baron approved his sentiments, and they continued conversing on the subject till interrupted by a servant's delivering a note to Edward, who perceived, the moment he cast his eyes on the hand-writing, that it was from the count. The contents were merely these : ' That if he avoided the sight of my brother, it was not from motives of cowardice, but from a painful consciousness

consciousness of the injury he had done himself and family ; nor could any consideration induce him to raise his arm against the life of Adeliza's brother.— When you read this (he added) I shall have quitted the mansion of my uncle.' No sooner had Edward finished reading it, than he shewed it to the baron, issuing orders, at the same time, for his immediate departure, though importuned by d'Offat not to begin his journey till the next morning. But, when he found him resolute in leaving him, he expressed, most feelingly, his regret for the misfortune his sister had sustained ; but hoped she would soon forget the unworthy object of her regard. They parted with mutual politeness and esteem for each other ; and Edward travelled with the utmost speed, not even waiting on the road to take refreshment, so anxious was he to reach home before the fatal morning, dreading lest my disappointment should happen at

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the

the moment, when my expected felicity was to commence. But unexpected delays in procuring change of horses, baffled his wishes and exertions, and he arrived at the period so much feared by him, and which proved nearly dangerous in the extreme to myself.

“I need not say that this relation overwhelmed me with unspeakable sorrow; and, though I ought to have detested de Valcour, my heart harboured love in lieu of resentment, cherishing pity for the severity of his fate, in being united to a woman he detested. In vain did my mother, and Mrs. Belmont, my governess, endeavour to calm my mind; I sunk into fits of abstraction, that made me stupid and insensible, inspiring them with the most alarming fears on my account.—Whilst in this frame of mind, as I was standing one evening, in a melancholy posture, at the window of my apartment, contemplating

contemplating my wretched fate, and the perfidy of my lover, I perceived, by the light of the moon, which shone very clear, a tall figure of a man, muffled up in a large wrapping cloak, whose height and air struck me as bearing a strong resemblance to that of Eugene. I soon discovered that my judgment had not deceived me, by his presently holding up a letter, which he made signs for me to take ; and, though conscious I was acting wrong, from an irresistible impulse of curiosity, I untied my sash, and letting it down, he fastened the letter to it, and when I had drawn it up, disappeared. I bathed with tears the assurances of affection he had expressed, and, softened by the excuses he offered for his conduct, the errors of which he said was occasioned by the violence of his love for me ; and what woman is there who will not forgive the faults which her charms have caused ? He entreated me to meet him at the out-



skirts of the town, attended only by my maid (who was in his interest), as he wished to explain, and apologize for, all that appeared most faulty in his behaviour; and, if I agreed to this request, ‘which,’ added he, ‘is the only means of saving me from distraction, I implore you immediately to write me an answer, which I will return in half an hour to receive.’ Convinced of the guilty imprudence of complying with such a proposal, I nevertheless wrote, with a trembling hand, that I would meet him as he entreated: for I shuddered with horror, lest he should expose himself to the resentment of my brother, which he had likewise threatened to do, if I refused to meet him. In consequence of this, the following day, at the time appointed, I contrived, without the knowledge of my governess, while she was engaged with my mother, to leave the house, and, accompanied only by my maid Drufilla, walked  
to

to the place of assignation. Oh ! never can I describe our mutual anguish at the sight of each other : for we were both shocked at viewing the devastation sorrow had made in our appearance. He clasped me in an agony to his bosom, whilst I shed a torrent of tears ; and, after a thousand protestations of his affection, though without attempting at any of the promised extenuation of his conduct, we parted, and I insisted upon its being for the last time : but his frantic gestures, which made me tremble, drew from me a reluctant consent to meet him once more, on that day week, but it must then be positively for the last time. When I returned home, I hurried to my own apartment, where I relieved the agitation of mind, which I had suffered in my interview with de Valcour, by giving way to an excess of grief, and was surprised in this situation by my mother, and Mrs. Belmont.

“ ‘ With the occasion of these tears,’ said my mother, ‘ I am but too well acquainted, Adeliza ; for suspecting something, when I learnt that you had walked out, indisposed as you are, attended by no one but Drusilla, I mentioned my suspicions to your governess, who instantly followed you at a distance, and discovered your interview with the count.— From your father and brother I shall conceal your guilty imprudence ; for, should they know what has passed, already so much exasperated as they are against him, every thing most dreadful is to be expected from their resentment. In a few days Edward sails for England, as he must join his regiment by that time, his commander having informed him he can have leave of absence no longer, and my fears, on his account, will then be at an end. But for your father I shall still continue to be alarmed : I must therefore intreat you, if you love your mother, utterly  
to

to discard the count from your remembrance, to have no more secret assignations or correspondence with him, but renounce him for ever, as a worthless being who endeavours to seduce you from virtue, and consequently from happiness.'

" I flung myself on my knees before my mother, intreating her forgiveness for the want of candour my conduct had shewn, assuring her, that in future she should be my sole confidant, and that I would discharge, with her permission, Drusilla from my service. ' That is not by any means necessary,' she replied ; ' be but sincere, my Adeliza, till we return to England, which I think it will be best to do in a few weeks, and it will then be soon enough to discharge her.' I then mentioned to my mother my having promised to meet the Count again, and that I would write to him to give over all thoughts of it. My mother, after musing some time, said, ' I think



think it may perhaps irritate him to some extravagance; therefore, after Edward has left us, you shall have a final interview with him, and, to prevent your father's having any suspicion, Mrs. Belmont shall accompany you.' I thanked her with grateful tears for this condescension, and she left me with a mind much more calm.

" When Edward took his leave of us, I was extremely affected, feeling the most mournful presages of future woe. He embraced me with unusual tenderness, intreating that I would endeavour to regain my former spirits. I promised that I would; though, Heaven knows, I was far from expecting it. The next day I wrote to Eugene, that I should meet him the following morning, and with Mrs. Belmont for my companion. I attended at the place of assignation. When I informed him, that I now saw him for the last time, and must never correspond with him again,

again, I was astonished at his composure; for he gave not way to any of those violent fallies so natural to him, but bade me adieu with a fullen reserved air, which I attributed to my being attended by Mrs. Belmont. His calmness restored mine, and we parted with a tranquillity which I little expected, though I confess it was no small exertion for me to command my feelings at such an affecting and interesting moment.

The time appointed for our return to England soon elapsed; and in a few hours we were to embark on board the vessel which was to convey us from a shore, where I had encountered the most heart-felt misery. Since our last interview, I had neither seen or heard of de Valcour, at which I was surprised, but not sorry, as the revival of tender ideas would have lessened my fortitude. My father and mother embarked first, as I had delayed to

make some purchases that I wished, and Mrs. Belmont remained with me. We were in a shop buying lace, when a messenger came to us, saying, my father and mother were come on shore, as the wind was not fair, and desired to see Mrs. Belmont and myself instantly at the house of Monsieur Blefaes, a friend of ours, who lived about a mile from Montpelier. Without any suspicion, Mrs. Belmont entered with me into a carriage that was waiting for us (as the messenger said) by my father's desire, and it drove away furiously. But soon, to our great surprise, we found ourselves, notwithstanding all our cries and entreaties (for we began to be much alarmed), several leagues from Montpelier: we continued travelling till the night was far advanced, and then stopped at a wretched hovel, which our conductor, the false messenger, styled an inn. On our alighting, we found the carriage surrounded by several horsemen, who, we concluded,

concluded, had travelled with us ever since the darkness of night commenced. Refreshments were placed before us, but we were too much agitated and dispirited to partake of them. Mrs. Belmont suspected de Valcour to be the author of our misfortunes ; and, indeed, I knew no other person of whom I could entertain such suspicions. After remaining an hour at the inn, two men disguised entered the room, desiring me to follow them. I assented, finding it useless to make resistance ; but on Mrs. Belmont's arising to follow me, they rudely pushed her back, and, notwithstanding all our prayers, screams, and remonstrances, forced me from her, almost senseless, to the carriage, in which I was no sooner placed than a gentleman entered, whose voice, as he tried to sooth me, I instantly recognized to be de Valcour's. I shrunk from him with horror, calling him the destroyer of my peace, the murderer of my parents,

and



and most abhorred of my soul. To these invectives, which he was conscious he too well deserved, he made no reply, but suffered the storm of passion to abate. During the journey, he conducted himself with the most scrupulous delicacy and respect ; and evinced the greatest tenderness for me, when we arrived at the chateau, as I was faint and ill from the agitation of my mind.

“ But, to be as concise as possible, for I will not fatigue you with a recapitulation of all the arts he used to seduce me from virtue, which were aided by my own fondness for him, and, alas ! too soon trusting to his promise to consider me as his wife, and, when the countess was dead, whose health he said was in a precarious state, claim me in the eyes of the world as his ; these circumstances combining together may, perhaps, incline you to pity me, when, abashed and trembling, I confess

fess that I am no longer innocent, and although so short a period has elapsed since my fall from virtue, the inconstancy of Eugene has already disclosed itself, as I appear quite an object of indifference to him. That I had been supplanted by some more fortunate rival, I began to suspect, and was soon confirmed in my conjectures, upon being ordered a few days previous to your arrival to quit the chateau, where I had always been accustomed to consider myself as its mistress. I was likewise commanded to wear a peasant's garb, to take up my abode at this cottage, and never to approach the chateau, or make myself known to its visitors, under pain of forfeiting the little portion of regard the count still felt for me. These injunctions I have strictly obeyed, and my time has passed since I have inhabited this rustic dwelling with no other companion but the old woman, who passes for my mother, in an insupportable state of melancholy.

choly. The only ray of comfort, that has broke in upon me is the sight of you, as the benevolence of your countenance and affability of your manners lead me to conclude that you are amiable, gentle, and compassionate, and will feel for the sorrows of an unhappy being, though you may condemn her errors. Perhaps I have been imprudent in thus revealing my situation to a perfect stranger; but I am very young, not yet seventeen, and having suffered so much from the treachery and baseness of the other sex, inclines me to place more confidence in my own. You are shortly I find to return to England, and will you then have the goodness to oblige me by inquiring after Mr. and Mrs. Ormond of Stavordale-hall, in Devonshire, and write what intelligence you gain concerning them, directing it for me at this cottage? The few moments of happiness I have enjoyed, since torn from their protection, have been embittered by

anxiety

anxiety on their account, as all that I have heard relating to them from de Valcour was, that they failed from France immediately after the arrival of Mrs. Belmont at Montpellier, their departure being accelerated by a letter which he forged in imitation of my hand, wherein I requested they would make no attempt to recover me, as I remained with the count by my own consent.

“ I fear, Miss Montrose, that I have trespassed on your patience, in relating how I am situated ; but a broken heart finds relief in disclosing its sorrows in the bosom of sympathising goodness. I have now nothing more to add, than to thank you for your patient attention to my recital, and to intreat you will be on your guard against the count from what I too fatally know of him, as I am convinced of his being in love with you.”

Ermina



Ermina expressed herself obliged for the caution she received, which she declared to Adeliza should not be given in vain, and mentioned how astonished she was to find de Valcour a character of so much intrigue, dissimulation, and infidelity. She likewise assured her, that although her conduct had not been wholly free from error, it was to be attributed to the train of circumstances which she had unfortunately and undesignedly been thrown into, and which must exculpate her in no small degree with every liberal and benevolent mind, nor would she incur the severe censures of any, unless of those whose humane feelings were warped by prejudice, malevolence, and an unforgiving spirit.

“ Farewel, my sweet friend,” said she, pressing Adeliza’s hand as she took her leave—“ Farewel, and yield not to despondence; I will visit you as frequently as I can, and we will return to England together,

together, where you shall be restored to the bosom of your family; and should they not receive you, will you be my friend, and reside with me?" Tears of gratitude filled the eyes of Adeliza, who was so much affected with her goodness, that she could scarcely utter her thanks, and, stranger as she had long been to the voice of pity, Ermina appeared to her as the angel of consolation and benevolence, and, reluctantly, she beheld her depart with her faithful Terefe.

## CHAPTER IX.

——— Thou lamented shade,  
 Descend from those pure mansions where thou sitt'st  
 Exalted: hover o'er me; and as thou  
 Wert wont, support me in the hour of trial.

BALL HARTSON.

ERMINA's partiality for the lovely Adeliza was so much increased by her interesting narrative, that she resolved, as her father and de Valcour were to be absent some days, to take advantage of this opportunity to repeat her visits, as such another might not again occur during the residue of her stay at the chateau. She was quitting her dressing-room equipped for her walk, when the sound of an approaching carriage made her return quickly to see from the window whose it was; and

and she started with surprise at beholding the well-known liveries of de Valcour. Light as the gossamer, she descended the staircase, and in a few minutes was in the arms of Colonel Montrose; but when recovered from the joy of first seeing him, she perceived that sickness sat heavily on his brow, grief thrilled through every nerve of her affectionate heart, and was visible in her expressive countenance, which pained the colonel, though it demonstrated the warmth of her affection. He endeavoured to soften her uneasiness by representing his present illness as the consequence of fatigue, concealing from her that it was a severe relapse occasioned by a violent cold which had renewed his old and dangerous complaints, making his recovery little to be expected even by himself, and obliged him to curtail his visit. The virtuous life he had always led made him view his approaching end with fortitude and resignation, and he was content to die; but for  
his



his Ermina, the uncertainty of whose fate (even though her prospects appeared smiling from her intended union with Lord Henry), rent his bosom with anguish, and was the only cause that raised in him a wish to live. Many circumstances he considered might prevent their marriage, and leave her an unprotected, isolated being, whilst her youth and beauty, so far from protecting her from the world, would create her more enemies and treacherous friends, than if old and ugly. For his sweet and duteous child did he, therefore, when he felt himself better, hope to recover, to protect her for a few years longer; and sometimes, when illness again overcame him, he would pray with fervency to the beneficent Source of every good to pour the choicest blessings on her, and secure her from misfortune. After these acts of devotion, his mind always felt more undisturbed and resigned to the Almighty will, convinced that Providence will

will never forsake the good and virtuous who place their confidence in its all-seeing mercy, or, if denied happiness in this life, will be suffered to reap bright rewards in a future state.

Ermina's anxiety for her father was unspeakable, as he gradually grew worse, and she could no longer be blinded to his apparent danger. Her sorrows were heightened by the disappointment she felt at being unable to urge his departure for England, as the narrative of Adeliza had inspired her with the utmost detestation for the count, which, unaccustomed to deception, she found so difficult to disguise, that every moment she continued at the chateau appeared an age. Yet, as the colonel every day grew worse, nor could be removed without the utmost risque of his life, she endeavoured, instigated by necessity and a regard for her father's peace, to conceal her aversion for de Valcour,

Valcour, and her knowledge of his infamous character. But her situation was now the most pitiable that imagination can form.

In a foreign country, without a friend or relative near her, whose attentions and soothing might soften the agony of her mind, she passed whole hours in weeping by the bed side of her nearly expiring parent, from whom she, however, strove to conceal her tears. But ah ! too well did that beloved father feel, that he must quit all that remained to him of his lost wife, leaving his poor Ermina exposed to a merciless ungentle world. He had himself been the prey of duplicity and injustice ; and the victim of severe experience knew too well the dangers that environ youth, and unguarded innocence. These sad reflections often wrung his heart with the bitterest anguish ; yet, could he have seen her before his death the wife of Lord Henry

Henry Beauchamp, every wish would have been gratified, and he would have felt himself happy in his expiring moments. But the latter's sudden recal to England, and his own evident danger, cut off all hope of his witnessing this desired union, which he trembled lest any event should prevent, from the uncertainty of all human affairs.

Of his family, Colonel Montrose was the last that remained, and his long residence at Riversdale had estranged him from such of his friends as would have been advantageous connections for his daughter. Her maternal relations he knew would disown her, Mrs. Montrose having disobliged them by uniting herself to him; nor would he expose Ermina, for any consideration, to their insults. By the utmost œconomy he had saved from the income of his small paternal estate (which was to go to the next male heir) about



three thousand pounds, which he had placed in the hands of a banker for her use. This sum, with the cottage at Riverdale, was the whole property he had to bequeath her ; but he knew from the simple manner in which she had been educated, and the moderate bent of her mind, that it would be sufficient to support her with comfort, should her intended marriage not take place. The worthy Mr. Heywood and the Count de Valcour he appointed her guardians, for he considered the latter, notwithstanding his occasional levity, as endowed with a prudence and discretion beyond his years, and which almost equalled the former's ; nor is it surprising that the colonel should be thus duped, as Eugene had insinuated himself into his good opinion with that deep-laid artifice, of which no mind of integrity can be aware, unless some accident should develop the extreme art and depravity of the character.

With

With sentiments the most favourable towards de Valcour, Colonel Montrose, who found one evening from his inward sensations that death was fast approaching, resolved to consign his beloved and unfortunate child to the protection of the count, who, he intended, should place her in a convent till Lord Henry came to claim her as his bride. Judging from his own excellent heart, he hoped that a charge so solemnly delivered, in the mournful dying hour, would make so indelible an impression as to insure her a firm protector. Impressed with these ideas he summoned Ermina and de Valcour to the bed-side. The chill of death had already pervaded his decayed form, his countenance was pale and emaciated; but it still retained its sweetness, and his eyes sparkled with some of their former lustre, when he beheld his daughter and Eugene. This momentary animation soon, however, subsided—dewy damps bathed

his forehead, while an icy coldness stole over his feeble frame, and imperceptibly proceeded to extinguish the vital spark that yet faintly glowed within his brave and generous breast, the seat of every virtue that can adorn humanity. Overwhelmed with grief, though she suspected not so soon to lose him, Ermina hung mournfully over his expiring form, which she supported, as he raised himself to address the count whose hand he eagerly grasped. "Eugene," said he, in a solemn, but interrupted voice, "the pang of death would be to me much sweeter, and would lose half its bitterness, did I leave no loved object to lament my loss. Smooth then this awful moment, and soften its severity, by vowing never to forsake my child, my gentle, my affectionate Ermina. Be to her, though young yourself, the father and protector she is fated to lose, and, if you preserve the charge intrusted to you with fidelity, Heaven will reward  
your

your attention to the last wishes of a fond parent."

Affected with the touching scene before him, de Valcour promised with his life and fortune to protect her from every evil; and this solemn assurance calming the mind of the expiring Montrose, he then endeavoured, though in faltering accents, to console his daughter, whose trembling frame evinced the agony of her mind, while torrents of tears, which she in vain strove to suppress, bedewed her pallid cheeks. His sweet, yet feeble accents, afforded her a momentary consolation, but soon that charm was fled, for he ceased to speak, as the soul that animated his words was swiftly departing; and he spoke no more, when he had pronounced "Farewel my child! grieve not! I go to join thy fainted mother:" a few minutes after he raised his eyes towards Ermina, smiled benignantlly on her, and then look-



ing at the count as if to recommend her to his protection, he expired without a sigh or groan. So gently had life quitted him, that his daughter could with difficulty be persuaded that he was dead; for she thought, that exhausted by illness, he had fallen into a deep sleep. But, when the fatal conviction rushed upon her mind of her loss being irreparable, she felt it more poignantly from having indulged hopes of his recovery; and the anguish of these reflections threw her for several days into a state of almost constant insensibility, as the repeated fainting fits which seized her, lasted for several hours. "Oh woe unutterable!" she would exclaim, when restored to herself: "Can any sorrow or misfortune equal the loss of those we love?" It is only at these heart-rending moments that we truly feel how little life is to be valued.

Some

Some weeks elapsed before she was even well enough to quit her own apartment, being too miserable to admit of any consolation, or be the least composed. She had indeed no gentle female friend (had she been disposed to receive comfort) that would calm her mind by mingling tears of compassion with the bitter drops of anguish, that she frequently shed, or kindly pour the balm of sympathetic pity into her lacerated bosom. Young, afflicted, and a stranger in that part of the country where she now resided (for the count was the only one she could style a friend, and him she could neither esteem or confide in), what heart is there so hard as to refuse her its commiseration? Her misery was heightened, though it seemed scarcely possible to increase it, by not receiving any letters from Lord Henry, or her friend Madelaine, as sufficient time had elapsed for her to receive answers to those letters which her faithful Terefe (in

whose attachment she found her chief consolation) had written to them at her request immediately after the death of her father. This general silence appeared to her quite unaccountable: for, sometimes if a thought suggested itself, from what she had heard, though not experienced, of the inconstancy of men, and which made her think disadvantageously of Lord Henry, who, she would be inclined to think, had forgotten her; yet she considered again, that, to a certainty, the good sister must always remain the same amiable being. She then wrote herself to both these persons, intreating them to remove her uneasiness by letting her hear from them as speedily as possible; but she had the mortification to find her letters equally neglected with the epistles of Terefe. The whole world seemed now to her melancholy imagination to have deserted her; and she felt redoubled wretchedness, not only from the neglect of those friends,

that

that had been more particularly endeared to her since her invaluable loss, but likewise from the increased and troublesome attentions of de Valcour, who continued to defer placing her in a convent (as her father had enjoined him) under some frivolous pretext or other, and always evaded conversing on the subject when she introduced it. This mode of conduct disturbed and alarmed her to a degree that quite overcame the little spirits which she now possessed, and she was no longer the gay and blooming beauty that attracted the admiration of every eye, but a faint, though lovely, shadow of her former self, her mind being as much weakened as her form. At length she, however, resolved to resume her fortitude, and extricate herself from her present unpleasant, and (in the eyes of the world) improper situation; not that it struck her as any impropriety to remain in the count's chateau without another female; as conscious in-



nocence, and ignorance of the slanderous constructions placed by the busy ill-natured part of mankind on actions that will bear the utmost scrutiny, made her unsuspicious of provoking slander. But she found herself unhappy and uncomfortable in the society of de Valcour, whom she disliked, and could not avoid wishing, independent of it, for a companion of her own sex, which made her resolve, the next time she conversed with him, to speak in a decisive manner of her speedy departure from the chateau for St. Catherine's, where she intended to reside till she received intelligence from England, as her father had desired she might board at any convent she chose (though he supposed she would prefer the one to which she had been so long accustomed, from her attachment to the worthy sisterhood). In conformity to this resolution she informed the count of her intentions, which she observed covered him with surprise and confusion, and he at  
first

first made no opposition to her wishes; but, when somewhat recovered from his agitation, he endeavoured by the most plausible pretences to divert her from her purpose, and she plainly perceived that he appeared discontented and offended at her remaining inflexible to all his arguments and intreaties. Regardless, however, of his evident uneasiness, Ermina felt long-absent emotions of pleasure spring to her heart at the prospect of soon quitting an abode that had witnessed the severity of her sorrows, yet there was one circumstance that embittered her happiness, which was the difficulties she feared she should encounter in taking Adeliza Ormond with her, unknown to de Valcour: for, amidst all her own heart-rending distresses, she had not forgotten the unhappy situation of that unfortunate lady, who she had promised should be her companion, and never be forsaken by her. Hitherto, to her extreme mortifica-

tion, the count's vigilance, since the death of Colonel Montrose, had prevented her having another interview with that charming recluse, and it was only by a correspondence (facilitated by Terefe) that they knew how each other was circumstanced, and numberless were the plans suggested by the fair friends for their escape together without de Valcour's knowledge. Yet nothing satisfactory was the result of their letters, which made them determine to hazard an interview, and hold a consultation on the subject. They were conscious it would be attended with danger, yet they hoped (as Terefe was not to introduce Adeliza to the apartment of Miss Montrose till night had spread its friendly gloom to conduct her unseen), that they might escape detection, but at all events considered that to rescue Miss Ormond from her painful situation something must be risked.

The

The chapel bell had already tolled the midnight hour, which was beyond the time appointed by Adeliza for visiting the chateau, and Ermina, whose impatience exceeded all bounds at her want of punctuality, fought in vain to catch a glimpse of her from the gothic casements, which she opened with the idea that she might perhaps see her sylph-like form gliding through the trees. But heavy clouds obscured the pale light of the moon, preventing any object from being discernible, while the gloomy whistling of the wind through the spacious staircase, and long passages of the chateau, shut out every other sound excepting the nocturnal shrieks of the owl, which added to the solemn melancholy of the scene. Hopeless, she closed the casement, and then sat listening in breathless expectation to the slightest noise, till at length she thinks her wishes are gratified, as approaching footsteps resound through the gallery. They  
advance



advance to the door, which she eagerly flew to unfasten, when, bitter disappointment ! she, almost fainting, retreated from it, at beholding neither Adeliza, or her faithful Terefe, but the Count de Valcour, on whose countenance, as he entered, shone rage and malignant joy. Fled were the hypocritical smiles and affected softness, with which it was usually adorned ; and Ermina stood aghast, having scarcely power to move, so great was her consternation, whilst with sullen ferocious sternness he surveyed her. From this momentary stupor she was aroused by the count, who, with angry glances from his fine black eyes, which were fixed on her face, thus addressed her : “ Your countenance tells me, madam, that you are surpris’d and alarmed at this intrusion, which you may thank your own ill conduct for, as I certainly should not have presumed to break upon your retirement at this late hour, were it not designed to convince

convince you that I am not the poor dupe you imagine, for I have known (here his voice became almost choaked with passion) and prevented your intended interview with the traiterous Adeliza. And, since you have thought proper to act so treacherously, I shall keep no farther terms with you, and the respect you in future receive here, must entirely depend on your own conduct. You cannot be ignorant that I have long loved you. By that blush, you know it, Ermina, and would you but relinquish your fondness for Lord Henry Beauchamp, who has quite forgotten you, you might become happy yourself by rendering me so. Yet I fear your cursed infatuation to him will make you give no credit to my information, that you can never be his, as he exists for another female dearer to him than you have ever been. That smile of contempt tells me you reject this truth with disdain, and that it has no effect from  
your

your weak, credulous belief in his faith. I will therefore drop this subject for one of more consequence. Be assured then, haughty lady," continued he, elevating his voice, "that this chateau shall henceforth be the boundary of your liberty, unless you release yourself from it by giving me your hand." Here he paused, waiting Ermina's answer, who, overcome with grief and terror at his presence and violent conversation, but feebly reproached him for his ill conduct, from the fear of irritating him, and drawing upon herself insults; as she saw that passion had quite mastered his reason; yet, notwithstanding her alarm, she asked, though in gentlest accents, what was become of Adeliza. This question appeared to throw him into an inexpressible agitation, and he almost immediately arose, abruptly left her, and, shutting the door with violence, locked it on the outside.

Ermina

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Ermina remained some minutes after he had departed, in such an agony of grief and dismay, that she trembled lest it should affect her reason, and she was forced to hold her hand to her forehead, for her brain seemed all on fire. A gush of most welcome tears at length relieved her, and she cast a melancholy glance at her trunks, corded in readiness for her departure (which she had flattered herself would take place in a few days), and the sight of them brought more keenly the bitterness of disappointment to her recollection. "Poor Adeliza," she exclaimed, "how keen must be your sensations of misery, since mine are so severe! Her perturbed imagination would not suffer her to think of retiring to rest, and conjured up numerous terrific phantoms, that banished the idea of repose, and, though night was so far advanced, made her fearful of venturing to taste it. Fancy represented to her her favourite cottage at Riversdale, the  
first



first abode of her youth, where from the lips of her revered, beloved parent, she imbibed lessons of wisdom and virtue; and the recollection of those happy days brought to her remembrance an ivory casket which that dear father had bequeathed to her, with a solemn injunction to be particularly careful of it, as it contained papers of consequence to her. Time had mellowed and subdued the violence of her grief for his loss, which she now mourned with calmness and resignation, and endured with composure any circumstance that revived his memory, which induced her, with emotions less poignant than those she had before felt, to think of examining the contents of the casket, with the hope, under her present wretchedness, of finding something that would solace her unhappy mind.

The first parcel (on opening the casket) which she took out to examine, contained

tained letters that had passed between her father and mother, previous to their union; and, on untying the ribbon that secured it, two small packets, sealed up and directed for her, fell to the ground. She opened them, and, to her great joy, found they were portraits of her parents. Her mother's was set round with pearls, with a string of the same by which to suspend it, and on the back was her hair with the initials E. B. It had been drawn for her sister (who returned it her on her marriage) when she was nearly the age of Ermina, and so much like her, that it might have passed for her picture. It had the same fine, dark eyes, the same transparent and blooming skin, the same beautiful mouth, the only difference being in the hair, which was a dark auburn, and Ermina's was lighter. She now examined her father's portrait. He was drawn in regimentals, and the painter had given him that noble air, which distinguished him

him when living. His handsome, expressive countenance, and benignant smile, was likewise pourtrayed; and when Ermina surveyed these faithful memorials of her valuable parents, she heaved a sigh, and shed a tear of tender regret. She carefully deposited them again in the casket, and proceeded to examine the remainder of the papers. After looking over a great number, one parcel caught her eye, sealed up and directed, "To my dear daughter, Ermina Montrose." She hastily tore it open, and burst into tears as she read the following tender address written by her father.

"Dear object of my fondest affection, I already behold the tear of pity and softest feeling, that will bedew your cheek, as you read the faithful and unfortunate history of those who gave you being. I have hitherto spared myself a view of your sorrow, which I would willingly have done  
for

for ever, were it not necessary, that, when death shall have arrested from me the power of watching over your tender youth, you should be acquainted to whom you are related on your mother's side, which till now I have concealed from you. Perhaps, if ever by chance they may meet with you, they will soften their obdurate hearts towards an unhappy orphan, and relent in favour of the child of a man, to whom their hatred ought to be extinguished when he reposes in the silent grave."

So much was Ermina affected by this address, which brought to her memory all the proofs of parental love she had received from her dear father, that her eyes became dimmed with tears, and she found it impossible to read any more. But, recovering herself after some time, she again resumed the narrative, and then discovered (of which she was before ignorant) that  
her



her mother was the eldest daughter of Lord Belvidere, and that himself, as well as his daughter, Miss Lucia Belvidere, now Marchioness of Argyle, had treated her with the most unremitting cruelty for having united herself to Colonel Montrose. Lord Belvidere had one son, but he was very young when his eldest sister married; and, as her name was never mentioned in the family, by his Lordship's desire, he scarcely knew that such a person existed. This narrative contained a long account of the different stratagems invented by Lord Belvidere, to blast the reputation, and ruin the fortune, of his son-in-law, which disturbed the happiness and affected the health of Mrs. Montrose, who considered herself as the source of his ill-treatment, and it was only, when retired from the world to their cottage at Riversdale, that this charming pair knew any permanent felicity.

Ermina continued engaged with this mournful history of her parents for several hours ; and, when she had finished it, replaced it in the casket. Morning she perceived now began to dawn, and feeling herself divested of her former terrors, and exhausted with grief, watching, and want of sleep, she threw herself on the bed, without undressing, where she quickly sunk into repose. Frightful dreams frequently, however, disturbed her, and made her often start with horror ; but these restless slumbers continued notwithstanding till the close of day, when she awoke, somewhat calmer, but faint and languid. She was attended when she awoke by Madame Meunier, the count's house-keeper, who was quite in his confidence, and having persuaded Miss Montrose to take some slight refreshment, left her again to her own reflections. De Valcour had sent this confidential attendant several times to inquire after Ermina's health,

and,

and, as she brought constant intelligence of her being asleep, he commanded that she should on no account be disturbed. He had repented of his violence the preceding night, and judging likewise that his presence, till she was more accustomed to the idea of being in his power, might agitate her too much, he resolved to gain command enough over himself to refrain from seeing her for some days. The misplaced indulgence he had met with in his youth, added to the natural vehemence of his passions, and being his own master at an early period of life, made him continually sacrifice every virtuous sentiment to gratify his inclinations ; but where they did not interfere, he was generous, feeling, courageous, and humane. Nor did he in reality think of forcing Ermina to be his wife, as he was not yet depraved enough to use such violent measures, but hoped to gain her with her own consent, by retaining her in  
the

the chateau, and prevailing on her to believe that Lord Henry no longer loved her, which he flattered himself he should easily effect, from the little knowledge she had of life.



## CHAPTER X.

" Poor artless maid, to stain thy spotless name,  
 Expence, and toil, and art, united, strove  
 To lure a breast that felt the purest flame,  
 Sustained by virtue, but betray'd by love."

SHENSTONE.

**A** WEEK had passed since Ermina's confinement, and feeling herself seized one evening with a violent pain and giddiness in her head, she was so much alarmed, that she wrote to de Valcour, intreating permission from him to walk out, promising, if he suffered her to have this indulgence, that she would make no attempt to escape, and was only induced to make the request from a conviction, that if she did not enjoy the benefit of exercise

cise and walking in the fresh air, her health must inevitably be endangered, as she had always been accustomed to it. This request the count easily complied with, from his knowledge of her strict ideas of rectitude and honour, which never permitted her to deviate from her word; and, to shew the high opinion he had of her, he ordered her attendant to follow at a great distance, that she might be under less restraint than if he kept near her. She soon found herself much recovered by the air, and her spirits more enlivened than they had been since her misfortunes, though still exceedingly depressed, and she proceeded through the most woody part of the grounds, where the gloom, diffused by the shadowing trees, was congenial with the sad feelings of her soul. The thought, that she might, perhaps, never more behold her estimable and beloved Lord Henry, increased her woe, and she indulged it by reading, with a luxury of sorrow,

sorrow, the subsequent lines, which were the last he had written to her.

TO ERMINA.

Should Virtue from the sky descend,  
And hither deign her course to bend,  
Bedeck'd with native charms;  
All would, 'tis said, with rapture glow,  
Each base-born earthly joy forego,  
And fly to meet her arms.—

But ah! enthron'd amidst the Gods  
She sits, and sways their blest abodes,  
Great Jove e'en owns her reign;  
When first approached this iron age,  
She fled to shun its guilty rage,  
— Ne'er to return again.

Who would her heavenly emblem trace,  
See lovely Ella's matchless grace,  
Her sweet, contented smile;  
Her rosy bloom, her artless eyes,  
Her mien arrayed in modest guise,  
Her heart, unknown in guile.

As Ermina advanced, she observed to  
her left hand a very narrow path which  
had

had never attracted her notice before, and which she entered, impelled by curiosity. Pensively walking along, absorbed in reflections on past misery, and the melancholy prospect she at present had before her of future woe, when suddenly she approached close to the mouth of a cavern, so well concealed by trees, that it was by accident only she discovered it, having never heard the count mention that such a place was near the chateau de Valcour. An inclination to survey it induced Ermina to enter, though the gloom diffused by the over-hanging shrubs, which greatly obscured, and almost obstructed the entrance, would have had something awful and terrific to her at any other time; but now the unhappiness of her mind inspired her with less fear than otherwise she would have felt, as her extreme wretchedness caused even life to be indifferent to her. To her right, as she entered, flowed a rivulet, whose murmuring was

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the



the only sound that broke on her ear, through the stillness that prevailed around, and she proceeded till she reached a very broad part of the cave, when she turned down a small passage to her left hand. She now hesitated whether she should walk farther or not, as she perceived the glimmer of a light reflected against the rough and rocky sides of the cavern, when, after a momentary pause, she crept softly forwards, till she came to a small apartment at the end of this narrow passage scooped out of the solid rock. The door was ajar, and disclosed to her view Father Anselmo and another monk seated at a table in earnest conversation.

A brass lamp, which hung from the vaulted ceiling, discovered his fallow countenance, that had a ferocious air, such as she had never before observed, whilst his cunning grey eyes rolled wildly, darting the most malignant glances, that  
were

were produced apparently by the subject on which he was conversing with so much interest and animation, that neither himself or the other monk, whose back was turned to Ermina, and attentively listening to Anselmo, heeded the sound of approaching footsteps, although, indeed, they were so gentle as she drew nearer, that unless they had been on the watch, it was difficult to distinguish their sound. Secure then, she perceived, from detection, as she had ventured so far, and was afraid to retreat again, she placed herself behind the projecting point of a rock near the door, through a chasm of which she could observe the monks, and hear their conversation. She blamed herself for indulging a reprehensible curiosity, but could not resist a wish to know the free and undisguised sentiments of Anselmo, who, since her father's death, had treated her with an haughtiness bordering on insult, and she could not avoid be-

ing uncharitable enough to think him a bad character, not only from his unfeeling conduct to her whilst under the pressure of distress, but because she was certain de Valcour took his advice on most occasions, and had even endeavoured to make her think well of him ; in which, however, as he found it impossible to succeed, she doubted not but Anselmo had learnt from the count how deep-rooted her prejudices were against him, and conjectured this to be the reason why she received such unfeeling treatment from the haughty monk. After something that Anselmo had said, the other monk replied in an agitated voice, " Hold, 'tis cowardly to assassinate a woman, poison would be better." " No," rejoined Anselmo, " she may then by some means escape, and suspicion be infused into her bosom. She shall no longer stand between me and my interest ; for, were she disposed of, I could do whatever I pleased with de Valcour, and his fortune.

Call

Call it not murder." Here he raised his voice, his countenance assuming a more diabolical expression, which she plainly perceived, as the cowl he wore concealed but half his face. "Is it not a religious act to stab an heretic, who, wedded to the count, will raise a brood of others? Here, mark me! take this dagger, steal to her chamber in the dead of night, and point it to her breast: for I've decreed it; ere three days more shall pass, she dies: France shall not another week contain alive the hated offspring of Colonel Montrose." At these terrific words, Ermina trembled so excessively, that she had scarcely strength to creep from her concealment; but the fear, perhaps, of instant death, should she be discovered, as the place was favourable for assassination, gave her renewed strength and courage; and, as they continued eagerly conversing, Anselmo's confederate stipulating the reward he was to have for murdering her,



she seized the favourable moment, and, cautiously and quietly retreating, she escaped without discovery from the cavern, whence she had no sooner issued, than she flew like lightning up the narrow path, and regained the other she had left. She saw the servant at a little distance, and, endeavouring to conceal her agitation, told him she was fatigued with her walk, and desired to return to the chateau. When she reached her own room, she reflected with horror on the view she had before her of a violent death, till, after much consideration, she resolved to tell the count what she had fortunately heard, as she knew he loved her too well to wish her murdered. She, therefore, sent to request to speak with him immediately; and the answer she received was, that the Count de Valcour could not see her till the next day at noon, and hoped then to find her in a humour to comply with a request he had to make. With this message she

she was obliged to rest satisfied, though she trembled at the idea of imparting what she had heard to him, as the longer it was delayed the more alarmed she felt, fearing he might not believe her, and think it a scheme of her's to lower Anselmo (whom she disliked) in his opinion. But at all events she endeavoured to reconcile her mind to her situation, and, if she must lose her life, be resigned to her fate. The next morning, when Madame Meunier attended her at breakfast, she felt very unwell from the terror that had influenced her the last evening, and, finding it impossible to partake of any thing placed before her, requested permission of the housekeeper that she might walk in the gallery which led from her apartment to the grand staircase. This favour, after a little hesitation, was complied with; but Ermina observed that Madame Meunier remained at the end of the gallery, on purpose to prevent her escaping, should

she make any attempt of that description. In mournful silence our heroine paced the gallery, listening to the melancholy whistling of the wind through the branches of the trees: for the day was cheerless and gloomy as her fortune. Her sorrowful fancy reverted to the memory of her beloved father, now mouldering in the earth, and drops of affliction trembled on her cheeks, whilst sobs of tender remembrance burst from her throbbing bosom, as her eye glanced from the casements towards the spot that contained his turf-covered grave, which she wished to bedew with the melting tears of affection. Ardently did she sigh for the presence of her valuable Madelaine and Lord Hénry, for she was assured in her own mind that de Valcour had intercepted her letters to them, which had been the occasion of their silence; and this opinion made her most miserable from the dread of forfeiting their esteem, by her apparent neglect, as she

judged

judged it impossible for them to conjecture the real cause. "Alas! my beloved father," she involuntarily exclaimed, "how truly did you depict this treacherous world, pointing out the thorns lurking constantly beneath the roses strewed in the path of life. Ah! would you were but here to console me under this cold pressure of sorrow, so severely do I feel the loss of your tenderness!"

These sad reflections were interrupted by a sudden bustle and loud noise of several voices, and shutting and opening of doors with violence, which disturbed the quietude, that, till then, reigned throughout the chateau. Surprised, she ran to the gothic casement, whence she beheld a post-chaise and four, and from the appearance of the horses it must have been driven with great rapidity, as they were quite in a foam. Ermina's curiosity was excited by so unusual an appearance, the count  
having



having received no visitors since his intention of detaining her in his power; which she was well acquainted with, as he had himself informed her of it, to preclude all hope from her breast of escaping by informing any one of her situation. She put several questions to Madame Meunier, who seemed as curious as herself, and impatient to desert her post. After remaining an hour longer in the gallery, Ermina returned again to her own room, evidently to the great joy of the house keeper ; who, in her extreme eagerness to know what had occurred, forgot to use the precaution of locking her fair charge in her apartment. Ermina could not help smiling at her eager curiosity, which had made her guilty of an imprudence that would lose her the count's confidence if he knew of it, though she would not attempt to escape, convinced she must be seen and retaken as it was open day, and a number of people dispersed in the grounds, and  
different

different parts of the chateau ; and she feared likewise that she should receive more cruel treatment if discovered in the act of flying from it. She calmly, therefore, sat down to write the detail of her misfortunes to Sister Madelaine, intending always to carry it about her, that it might be ready in case an opportunity should occur to convey it to St. Catherine's, unknown to her persecutor.

When she had finished, she placed the writing in her bosom ; and sat, musing, in a dejected posture, on the severity of her lot. But from this reverse she was soon awakened by shrieks of horror and anguish, that awfully rent the air as they re-echoed through the spacious chateau. She listened for some time to these mournful sounds in consternation and astonishment, till they seemed to approach nearer, and threw her into the utmost terror for herself ; as she fancied she saw the dagger of Anselmo

selmo already pointed at her breast, and rushed towards the door, feeling an involuntary inclination to endeavour to escape from the scene of horror that awaited her. But, weakened by affliction, trembling, and nearly petrified with the most dreadful apprehensions, she felt herself faint and void of strength or courage to fly from the dangers that apparently encompassed her; and, almost insensible, she supported her fainting frame against the wainscot. She was recovering resolution to quit her apartment, when the door suddenly bursting open, convulsed in an agony of fear and pity, she shrieked and started back at beholding the Count de Valcour stagger in, pale, feeble, and disfigured with blood, whilst over his once elegant and handsome form, death was inexorably making the most cruel and rapid devastation. He had only remaining strength to approach her with uncertain steps, and sinking at her feet, raised his fine eyes towards

wards

wards her, as if to implore her pardon; and, alas! the lustre that used to shine in them, had now given place to a dejected expression of pain and repentance. Slowly and convulsively, he then articulated the word—"Forgive!"—gave a piercing groan, and fell lifeless before her. Stunned with excess of sorrow, and poignant anguish at this melancholy spectacle, exhausted, terrified, nature could no more support itself, and she sunk inanimate beside him.

From this state of insensibility she was awakened by the loud and agonizing shrieks of Adeliza, who entered soon after this scene of horror, in which the count had breathed his last, and deprived Ermina of her senses. Ah, what a distracting sight for one who loved so well, so true, as this unfortunate girl! No tears fell from her eyes, no sighs heaved her wretched bosom, but hollow groans burst from



from her as reason fled its throne at beholding the man she loved a breathless corpse. Her's was no selfish passion, for she had sacrificed friends, honour, and even happiness, for his sake, as she had too much innate virtue to endure a life of guilt. To render her misfortunes still more bitter, if that were possible, it was to his crimes he had fallen a victim, and the punishment was inflicted, Ah! dreadful to relate, by the hand of her brother, who, after an unavailing search for some time, had at length too fatally discovered the seducer of his sister, and hastened to be revenged, resolving, by an endeavour to deprive him of life, to blot out the disgrace his family had sustained. They met, fought, and, after mortally wounding the count, Edward Ormond fled, and de Valcour forbade any of his servants to pursue him, wishing to atone in his last moments by this act of generous forgiveness for the wrongs he had done Adeliza; but his in-

jurious

jurious treatment of Ermina still more agonized his mind, and, having been supported to her chamber, as he was anxious to convince her he repented of his guilty errors, he then expired at her feet, imploring her pardon in the manner that has been described.

Ermina, when restored to reason and recollection, centered all her thoughts in recovering Adeliza, whose situation she considered as much more pitiable than her own, but of little avail were her cares and soothing assiduity, madness had already seized her brain; for cruelly as she had been treated, she loved de Valcour too well to support the idea of his untimely end, and that she was the occasion, though unwillingly, of her brother's having deprived him of life. The tender attentions of the feeling Miss Montrose were ineffectual to snatch the lovely mourner from

from the grave, and the same tomb enclosed the ashes of Adeliza and Eugene. “ Unfortunate and lamented pair ! ” sighed Ermina, as with weeping eyes she followed them to their last sad habitation ; “ what a melancholy example are ye of the punishment attendant on guilt, and how severely has the hapless Adeliza suffered for her imprudence in the death of her faithless lover, the misery of her parents, and her own wretched fate ! De Valcour had indeed triumphed for a time in the success of his wicked schemes, but at length suffered the reward due to such complicated crimes, which it was shocking to think so young a mind could project and execute ; yet some excuse may be made for him, as to Anselmo’s pernicious instruction and advice may be attributed the origin of his faults : for that vicious monk, to forward his own interest, and render himself necessary to the count, flattered and inflamed his

his passions, promoting likewise the most diabolical plans to place him more in his power. He had left the chateau immediately on de Valcour's decease, and Ermina had no longer any apprehensions from him, as she was not now a bar to the possession of the count's fortune, which he was, however, effectually excluded from, as the latter had made no will in his favour. Abandoned as was Anselmo's mind, and as great his dislike to Miss Montrose, he would not, without a prospect of emolument to gratify his revenge (as he was ignorant that she knew his dreadful intention to murder her), risque the endangering of his own life, which he must inevitably, in case of a discovery, be deprived of as a punishment for his atrocious crime.

Impatient to quit a place that had produced her so much misery, Ermina, though



though scarcely able, from the repeated shocks her constitution had received, to undertake a journey to St. Catherine's, resolved to endure any thing, however painful and disagreeable, rather than remain a moment longer than she could avoid within the chateau's hated walls, where every object served to remind her of her beloved father, and the scenes of horror she had witnessed. Terefe, who had been in confinement as well as her mistress, and restored to liberty by the count's death, was almost frantic with joy at beholding her dear lady again; and it was a real consolation to Ermina, that she should have this faithful girl to accompany and attend her on her journey. Having made the necessary arrangements for their departure, Miss Montrose and her affectionate attendant bade for ever adieu to the chateau de Valcour, which they had entered with sensations very different from those

those with which they now left it. A thousand heart-wounding recollections suffused Ermina's eyes in tears as they caught a last glance of the dark turrets of the chateau; and she sobbed almost to agony, when, weeping, she viewed at a distance that hallowed spot that enshrined the ashes of her father, and with the humid swell of disappointed affection, she lamented with renewed grief the early sorrows and disappointments of her life.

## CHAPTER XI.

O! thou hast from thy bosom cast away  
 The sweetest flower that ever nature form'd!

DODSLEY.

**G**LOOMY and slowly passed the time till Ermina arrived at her beloved convent, and was folded to the bosom of her affectionate friend Madelaine, and she felt comparatively happy, when surrounded by beings who loved and admired her still more for the sufferings she had undergone. They used every endeavour to console and sooth her mind, and, by degrees, the balm of sympathetic pity which they poured into her lacerated breast, healed its poignant anguish, though she continued for a long time too unhappy, from the memory of her deep misfortunes, to take pleasure  
 in

in those pure and innocent pursuits which she had formerly so much enjoyed; but the good nuns were charmed, if they saw but a small portion of her former cheerfulness return, and increased their efforts to render her happy.

Amongst the new boarders who had taken up their residence at St. Catherine's since Ermina's absence from it, was a lady to whom she became attached from the first moment she was introduced to her. Lady Julia Vernon (for thus this lady was named) had just entered her four-and-twentieth year, and would have formed a complete model for an Hebe. She was a widow, and having tenderly loved her husband, wished to pass the days of her widowhood in retirement. For this purpose she fixed on the solitary monastery of St. Catherine for her residence. Ermina was struck with her appearance the first time she saw her. Her features were not

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regularly handsome ; but the animated expression of her countenance compensated for this fault, and the alluring sweetness of her smiles, with the melting lustre of her beautiful blue eyes, no heart could withstand. Added to these charms, with which nature seemed to have luxuriantly adorned her, she possessed the finest complexion imaginable, a figure formed with the most perfect symmetry, and remarkably tall ; and at the first glance of this bewitching woman, sentiments of love and admiration pervaded every bosom. Ermina thought her worthy of being empress of the world, instead of being mistress but of a very moderate fortune, as few such fascinating females exist. Lady Julia soon gained the entire confidence of Miss Montrose, whom she easily persuaded to be her companion on her return to England. The latter had consented without reluctance to this plan, as she had received no intelligence of Lord Henry, notwithstanding she had

had written repeatedly to him since de Valcour's death; and, finding it difficult to define the cause of his silence, hence sprung her eagerness to visit England, as she would then, she hoped, learn the real occasion of this apparent neglect, which pained her the more forcibly, as, since the death of her father, her wounded mind rested for comfort in the consolatory idea of his affection, the knowledge of its having smoothed the dying moments of her beloved parent. She had likewise another motive, which was to visit the cottage at Riversdale, and pass some time in the society of Mr. and Mrs. Heywood, and their amiable Merelina, as she remembered the whole family with regard. The cottage which her father had purchased now belonged to her, and she resolved never to dispose of it. In thinking with tender regret of former scenes of felicity, and in planning future plans of happiness, Ermina passed many hours till the

period arrived, which Lady Julia had fixed for her return to England. She had surmounted her grief for the loss of her husband Sir Edmund Vernon, and was impatient to leave France, as melancholy had fled, and her native vivacity become as exuberant as ever; for, in fact, all those who were acquainted with her character, had been astonished that she persevered so long in her sorrow.

Again Ermina bade adieu to the amiable inhabitants of St. Catherine, though with less painful regret than she had ever done before, as hopes of future happiness brightened the scene. With reciprocal vows of unceasing friendship, her friends and herself parted; but a sadness overcame her, and tears rolled down her cheeks, notwithstanding all her flattering visions of felicity, as she waved her hand to them for the last time, and caught a farewell glance of Madelaine's venerable form.

Lady

Lady Julia's sensations were not at all in unison with hers, as her heart dilated with transport at the charming idea of again mixing in the gay world, and being freed from the banishment she had voluntarily imposed on herself. In the circles of fashion she was formed to shine, and, conscious of this, and of her beauty and fascinating powers, she possessed no small share of vanity, though frequently mortified at not receiving sufficient adulation, and perceiving that many women, not half so handsome as herself, were more admired, because they had larger fortunes, and consequently made a more brilliant figure.

Ermina soon discovered another trait in her character, which, at St. Catherine's, could not be developed, as in that solitude there was no field for the indulgence of it. This was an extreme love of satire; and, to gratify this propensity, the most



unjustifiable and severe remarks would escape her lips, which frequently shocked Ermina, and convinced her, that this talent, even when accompanied by the most shining wit, is generally dangerous to its possessors, tempting them often to indulge in the most illiberal observations for the sake of a brilliant sally, which renders them unamiable, and continually creates enemies.

When Ermina landed in England, emotions of sorrow agitated her breast: for memory brought the heart-piercing recollection, that, when before in her native country, she was then blessed with the society of her beloved father, and devoid of a single regret. At present, alas! what a mournful reverse! she had lost that valued father, was overwhelmed with the remembrance of her misfortunes, absent from her dear friends in France, and not a single being attached to her by the ties of

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consanguinity that would take notice of her, were she to apply to them. Many of her mother's relations were indeed alive, but she knew, as the offspring of Colonel Montrose, she should meet with disdain and contempt from those, from whom she ought to expect affection and commiseration. Lady Julia continued friendly and affectionate ; but Lady Julia in a convent, and Lady Julia in the fashionable world, were two very different beings ; for she entered with avidity into all the dissipations and amusements that London offered, obliging Ermina, though unwillingly, to partake of them, who would have preferred retiring into Westmoreland to the gaieties of town, having received a most friendly letter from Mrs. Heywood, lamenting the loss she had sustained, and expressing an ardent wish to see her. But to quit Lady Julia so soon, after the attention she had received, she considered as ungrateful ; and she knew likewise, that as her ladyship was

very capricious, it was extremely probable she would grow tired of her, and, by making no objection to her departure, reconcile her inclination to her duty; for she considered ingratitude to any one who had treated her with kindness, with the utmost abhorrence.

This idea reconciled her to remaining in London, where the round of pleasure she was engaged in ill accorded with the depression of her spirits, occasioned by the neglect of Lord Henry, to whom she had written immediately after her arrival, informing him where she was, and desiring to see him. Of this letter he had taken no notice, though she heard he was in town, and his father still alive, as they were both frequently mentioned in the parties amongst which she mixed; and she knew there could be no mistake, as she had sent to his lodgings in Brook-street, where he had desired his letters to be directed.

Against

Against this severe mortification, to which she imagined his inconstancy had subjected her, she endeavoured to struggle, but her spirits, in spite of all her efforts, began visibly to decline, and though sometimes supported by wounded pride, yet there were moments of reflection, in which the sorrow she strove to conquer, was scarce supportable, and her heart bowed down with the pressure of grief. She had fondly flattered herself, that, in Lord Henry Beauchamp, she should find protection and consolation, and that he would supply the place of the father and friend she had lost; and, bitterly lamenting her disappointment, she wept, and sighed from the melancholy apprehension that the same afflictions that had pursued her unfortunate parent, appeared to be unhappily destined for her.

Lady Julia often rallied Ermina for her depression of spirits, which she could ill



conceal from her penetrating eye ; and, one day, when she observed her more melancholy than usual, insisted that she should accompany her in the evening to Ranelagh. From this proposal she would willingly have escaped, as from many others of a similar nature, which were continually made to her, but Lady Julia was all sweetness and fascination, and she found it difficult to refuse her any thing when in this agreeable humour. The party that was to accompany them was very large, and most of them met early at Lady Julia's. Ermina was dressed with her usual elegance and simplicity, in a slight mourning. Her beautiful light auburn hair was ornamented with jet beads; she had on a train petticoat of white crape, with the body and sleeves of white satin, and a narrow black velvet girdle fastened with a jet buckle, encompassed her waist. A row of beads, similar to those that confined her luxuriant tresses, except in size,

as they were smaller, was suspended with an elegant pearl cross round her ivory neck. The finest point lace fell round her bosom, and the edges of her sleeves and petticoat were vandyked with black velvet. She looked uncommonly lovely, as her countenance had recovered that animated expression, which was its principal beauty, her mind having suffered a momentary oblivion of its sorrows, amused by the diversity of the present company, some of them charming from their elegant and pleasing manners, and others diverting from their eccentricities.

Mr. Devereux, a fine spirited young man of three-and-twenty, and famous for his vivacity, good humour, and incessantly laughing at no one knew what, introduced Sir Nicholas Dominick, a baronet, about the same age as himself. He was tall, slender, and erect as an Indian cane, but not so pliant ; for he appeared to be one

of those beings who are impenetrable to every thing. He spoke little and slowly, and with as much caution as if he feared his words were about to be construed into something treasonable ; yet was he a great observer of the conversation that passed around him, and might very well have been supposed the god of silence. Not even the good-humoured mirth and voluble nothings of Devereux, could make him unbend from the chilling reserve in which nature appeared to have enveloped him. He was equally blind to the advances of Miss Bell Grampus to draw him into an argument, of which she was distractedly fond, and always aimed to accomplish with every stranger who had the misfortune of being introduced to her. This eccentricity, so peculiar to this lady, with many other oddities, was a fund of diversion, till the novelty wore off, and she then appeared tiresome and impertinent. But she found Sir Nicholas inflexible to her

her most pointed attacks. The Honourable Mr. Murray, who was quite a coxcomb, and a great favourite with Bell Grumpus, from being almost as ridiculous and singular as herself, studied to divide his attention in an equal manner to each lady ; for he chatted with one, exchanged a smile with another, offered snuff to a third, and was laughed at by every one, yet he retained all his self importance. His chief foible was the rage of being fashionable, and fashionable words, fashionable airs, and fashionable follies, he was always studying to adopt. Ermina addressed some simple question to him, but he made her no answer, being engaged in an argument with Bell Grumpus, in which he attempted to defend revolutionary principles: for, with all his fondness for fashions and people of rank, he affected to despise nobility (though of an ancient family himself), and was a warm advocate for equality, as he had not any thing to lose, being



being exceedingly poor. Devereux, perceiving his inattention to Miss Montrose, flapped him on the shoulder — “ Why, Murray, my boy,” said he, “ what are you prosing about, when a fine girl is speaking to you?” “ Sir,” said Murray, turning to him with a solemn air, “ suppose, for instance, I was talking to Mistress Beaufort, I could not attend to Mistress Ashby, which is the present case ; for, as I was conversing with Miss Bell Grampus, I could not pay attention to Miss Montrose.” Devereux left him with a horse laugh, and an ejaculation of quiz, and Lady Chetwin arriving at that moment, they immediately accompanied her to Ranelagh, as she was the last of the party.

The brilliant spectacle which the Rotunda presented, the elegant groups of fashionable company, with the beauty of the women, and taste of their dress, was singularly

larly striking to Ermina, who had seldom seen any thing so splendid before. Every unpleasant thought fled her bosom in this abode of elegant enjoyment, and, her native gaiety returning, she never felt more disposed to be happy. When they had walked till they were tired, the gentlemen proposed conducting the ladies to a box. Devereux was particularly attentive to Ermina, and talking soft nonsense, as she followed Lady Julia, who, seeing her in such good spirits, whispered with good-natured exultation, "Am I not a good physician for the mind, as my prescriptions are so efficacious?" She smiled, and was going to answer her, when a gentleman, in passing near her, stepped on her train, which got entangled with his foot. She turned hastily round on his beginning to apologize for this accident, when, imagine their mutual surprise at recognizing in each other, Lord Henry Beauchamp and Ermina Montrose.

The

The intended apology died away in confused murmurs on Lord Henry's lips, the glow of surprise faded to an ashy paleness, and instead of returning the animated smile, he received from her, with the same look of pleasure, or accepting her proffered hand, which was extended towards him, he surveyed her with a repulsive gravity, uttered in a faltering voice, a few incoherent words of congratulation on seeing her in England, coldly bowed, and left her. This strange indifferent conduct involved Ermina in a stupor of confusion and astonishment, mingled with sensations the most painful, from which she was, however, soon awakened by the arch and jocular remarks of Devereux, who rallied her unmercifully on the emotion she had betrayed. But she felt no inclination to retaliate his raillery, and his vivacity, hitherto so amusing, became irksome and insupportable, as her pleasure for the evening was destroyed by the shock she  
had

had received from the insulting coldness of Lord Henry's manners on this accidental rencontre, which totally destroyed the faint hope she had still retained of his fidelity. She saw him several times afterwards in the course of the evening, but he spoke no more, though she often caught him looking at her, when he thought himself unobserved, and their eyes frequently met, yet she always hastily turned hers another way when they encountered his, as wounded pride and injured innocence made her endeavour to view him with dislike and indifference: for, added to the cold neglect of his behaviour when they first met, he had since, as they passed each other in walking round, stared her insolently in the face, and then given her a sneering smile of contempt.

Widely different were Ermina's sensations when she returned home with Lady Julia to those with which she had quitted it.



it. Spiritless and fatigued, she felt rejoiced when separated from the company that in the beginning of the evening had so much entertained her, and flattering herself, by courting repose, to calm the perturbation of her mind. But in vain she sought sleep; it fled her restless pillow, and, after passing a night of exquisite misery (for reflection forbade rest), she hailed the return of morn with joy, eager to quit her uneasy couch, whence she arose pale, haggard, and unrefreshed. Her tortured imagination represented, in spite of her endeavours to banish these cruel thoughts, the mortifying interview and insolent conduct she had experienced from Lord Henry, at Ranelagh. And she was now too fatally convinced, that he no longer existed for her, and, not content with shewing his neglect, even treated her with contempt. Can this be the same being, she reflected, who was the friend and comforter of her beloved father,

ther,

ther, and professed a tender attachment to his daughter? Can it really be he who since that friend reposes in the silent grave, shuns and insults his child, when she most needs pity and consolation? "O! cruel and unfeeling!" she exclaimed, while tears of anguish bathed her pallid cheeks; "why did I for thy sake, Lord Henry, mix in the world? Happier had I been secluded in the quiet walls of St. Catherine's, where my moments glided away in peace, security, and happiness, till an ungrateful man disturbed my quietude! For, alas! the first real sorrow I ever felt, was on his account." Thus did the hapless Ermina secretly lament the desertion of her lover, whose conduct, after the maturest consideration, she could only impute to an inconstancy of disposition, which was difficult to reconcile with the strict honour and integrity she had hitherto imagined he possessed. Involved in doubt, she scarce knew what to think, as,

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notwithstanding her youth, she had already been the victim of dissimulation, where she least expected to meet with it : for, in the Count de Valcour, she had witnessed a terrifying example of its fatal effects.

To banish melancholy retrospections, which frequently by their intrusion destroyed her peace of mind, she entered with avidity into all those amusements in which Lady Julia had before found a difficulty in making her participate ; but her heart now revolted at the idea of retaining a spark of regard for a man, so careless of her felicity. She had accompanied Lady Julia one evening to the theatre, when, in returning home the coachman being intoxicated, the carriage was overturned ; and amongst the spectators who offered their assistance to the terrified ladies, were two gentlemen, from whom they received particular attention. They were passing by in a chariot at the time of the accident,

dent, and feeling interested for such beautiful women, and to prevent any impertinence being offered to them as they were unprotected, the eldest of the gentlemen asked permission to set them down in his carriage, as Lady Julia's was too much damaged to convey them home in safety. They accepted this offer with an acknowledgment for his politeness, and, having handed them to the carriage, the gentlemen jumped in afterwards, and ordered it to be driven to Hill-street, where Lady Julia resided. From the little conversation that passed during their short ride, the eldest of their protectors struck the fair friends as a very agreeable man; but the other appeared to be exceedingly giddy, and made a thousand wild and ridiculous sallies.

Some days after this affair, as Lady Julia and Miss Montrose were seated at work in the drawing-room, one of the female



male servants brought in two cards that had just been given in. Lady Julia glanced her eye carelessly over them, but looked surprised on seeing the name of the Honourable Mr. Glencarnock and Mr. Spencer. "I do not know these persons," said she, addressing Ermina, "but conjecture they are the beaux that escorted us in safety after our accident, returning from the theatre; as you recollect we were too much alarmed to inquire who they were. Betty is going with a message from me to my friend Lady Chetwin, and she shall take a note at the same time to Mr. Glencarnock (as he lives near her Ladyship), to invite him and his friend Spencer to my rout to-morrow evening, as I wish to shew them I am sensible of their politeness. I suppose, Betty, as the footman was out, you opened the door to these gentlemen?" "O yes, my lady, and both the gentlemen were fine looking men, especially that one who gave me

me the card with the name of Glencarnock on it, for he was very tall indeed." From this description Lady Julia thought she could not be mistaken in supposing who they were, and, writing her note, dispatched Betty immediately to Lady Chetwin's and the Hon. Mr. Glencarnock's.

An hour and an half had elapsed since Betty left Hill-street, and Lady Julia rang her bell to know if she was returned, being impatient to hear if Lady Chetwin was well, as the last time she saw her she was rather indisposed. Betty had just entered the house, and answered the bell in person; but, when she came into the room, Lady Julia and Ermina were much surprised at seeing her face convulsed with laughter, which she in vain endeavoured to suppress. "I beg your pardon, my lady," said she, "for laughing so, which is very ill-behaved of me, but I cannot help

help it if I was to die. If you had but seen the little gentleman, you would not be-astonished at my behaviour." "What little gentleman are you talking of?" asked Lady Julia. "Why, my lady, you see, when I got to Berkeley-street, I went to Mr. Glencarnock's lodgings, and sent up your note to him. I had waited a few minutes, as your ladyship ordered me, for an answer, when a little ugly hump-backed man came down to me." "This note," said he, "is from a Lady Julia Vernon, who is she?" "A lady, sir (I answered), and my mistress." "I am the Hon. Mr. Glencarnock," he replied, "but I left no card at her ladyship's house, as she mentions. I am afraid it is a trick that has been played by some gentlemen of my acquaintance, who, I fancy, have used my name to carry on an intrigue. However, give my compliments to your lady, and say I'll wait on her directly. I assure you I'm not afraid of meeting the ladies."

"Oh!

“Oh! my lady, you never saw anything so frightful as he is, and dressed to the extremity of the fashion!” Betty had scarcely finished her recital, when a thundering rap at the door announced the arrival of the Hon. Mr. Glencarnock.

Lady Julia and Ermina were not much surprised at the sight of him, as they had been prepared for it, otherwise they would have been shocked and astonished at the decided contrast he formed to the person they had first expected. He strutted into the room with as consequential an air as if he had been six feet high, and replete with self-importance. “I am surprised,” said Lady Julia, addressing him, “at the strange circumstance of two gentlemen leaving their cards, with whom I am unacquainted, and afterwards to find that one of them had assumed another person’s name; for it is really quite an enigma, as I cannot think what they propose by this



impertinence." Lady Julia then related their adventure as they were returning from the playhouse. " Spencer," said Mr. Glencarnock, raising himself upon his toes, " is an impudent fellow ; I am convinced this affair is a humbug of his : the first time I meet him, I am determined to pull his nose. This is not the first trick of the kind which he has played off on me. He is a fellow whom nobody knows. I never met him any-where but at Lord Blunder's ; nor can I imagine how he got introduced there. Two or three times since I have by accident been in his company, when he always pays me great attention ; but I take little notice of him, as his character will not bear investigation." The ladies smiled to hear a little insignificant being like this talk of pulling another man's nose, when he was too short to reach further than the elbow of even one of a moderate height. After more conversation on the subject, Glencarnock

Glencarnock took his leave, assuring Lady Julia that he would revenge the insult offered to her and Miss Montrose, as well as the affront he had himself received, and intreated Lady Julia to send for Mr. Spencer, and let them meet together at her house, as he wished to speak to him before her and her friend.

Mr. Spencer came the next morning in consequence of Lady Julia's writing to him; but she had formed the resolution not to send for Glencarnock, as she feared a quarrel might be the event of their meeting, which would be far from agreeable. His behaviour was confused, his conversation incoherent, and quite unsatisfactory, evading the subject of the card, and disowning any knowledge of Mr. Euston's (the gentleman that was with him) having substituted Glencarnock's card for his own, and supposed he must have done it through mistake. In short,

his manners were so wild and agitated, that Lady Julia was convinced, that the intention of his companion and himself was to affront, as they imagined, two unprotected women. Mr. Spencer was a fine looking young man, about twenty, and exclaimed as violently against Glencarnock, and with as much contempt, as Glencarnock had spoken disrespectfully of him, though, certainly, as the affair appeared, the latter was the person aggrieved; and Ermina told Mr. Spencer, that she considered it as exceedingly wrong of any one to insult Glencarnock on account of his ugliness and deformity, and that such conduct implied a great want of humanity. Spencer took no notice of this, but frequently asked if Glencarnock had spoken contemptuously of him, blustering very fiercely that he would chastise him if he had presumed to mention his name. Lady Julia observed it would be unmanly to act thus, as she considered

sidered him rather as an object of pity than resentment, and reprimanded this hot-headed young man for introducing him in so strange a manner to her. " Ah! Ah! little Humpy," said Spencer, " I dare say he was proud to pay his respects to you, as I know he is very fond of the ladies." Lady Julia frowned at the light manner in which he treated the insult offered to her, and replied, that she was not the least interested in Mr. Glencarnock's fondness for the ladies. Nothing seemed to awe this young man, or, if he felt any confusion, he endeavoured to disguise it by a profusion of words, and talked so much, and so fast, that the ladies were glad to be relieved from his company by his taking his leave.

When he had left them, Lady Julia took Ermina to make a morning visit to Mrs. Helderton, a lady just arrived in England from Lisbon, whence she had accom-



panied her husband's remains, who had died there of a consumption. " Her grief," said Lady Julia, " is of the most violent kind ; though *entre nous*," she continued smiling, " I fear it will resemble the old story of the Ephesian matron, as it is too outrageous to last. Indeed she goes by no other name in the circles of fashion, but that of the modern Ephesian matron ; for she cut off her hair, and placed it in his coffin, to be buried with him, and has, I believe, made a vow never to survive his loss, and almost starves herself to death. But these fine heroic resolutions, I am convinced, will be of short continuation ; and not many weeks, perhaps, elapse before she will have purchased a wig to supply the loss of the hair she has so thoughtlessly cut off." Notwithstanding this raillery on the part of Lady Julia, Ermina had too much goodness to suppose Mrs. Helderton's sorrow affected or overstrained, and felt much interested for

for her. She was, therefore, rather disappointed at seeing a very plain little woman, for she might truly be styled so, as she had the most muddy complexion imaginable, large unmeaning grey eyes, and, in short, not a decent feature, except a tolerable set of teeth, which were very conspicuous, and constantly shewn when in good spirits, as she was continually laughing to display them. But as this was not the case in the present instance, Ermina supposed her the mother of the young widow, instead of the young widow herself. Nor did her manners and conversation render her more prepossessing, though she expressed great pleasure at the sight of Lady Julia and her protégée, whom she professed to admire in terms so extravagant, as had little appearance of sincerity, pressing her to visit her frequently, saying, "it would be compassionate, as it did her good to see a young face." Ermina was not in the least pleased with

yet could not avoid being flattered, and grateful for the attention she received, and promised to wait on her very soon. When Lady Julia and Miss Montrose were again alone, the latter expressed her surprise at the small portion of beauty and charms with which nature had endowed Mrs. Helderton, and more especially as her companion, Mrs. Romney, had whispered to her that, when in good health and spirits, she was admired. "There are many impostors of that kind," said Lady Julia with a satirical smile, "for rouge is very shewy, and conceals many bad complexions; but, whilst in weeds, decency forbids her wearing it; though, even with that addition, she looks little better I assure you than you have now seen her: but a good independent fortune, with a volubility of small talk, will be followed by the men, and patronised by the women, who, finding nothing to envy, are good-humoured towards her, and have no suspicion

picion that under a gay exterior lurk envy, malice, and every thing that is detestable." Ermina paid little attention to these observations of Lady Julia's, convinced, from experience, that her love of satire made her often ill-natured to gratify it, and no one escaped her lash, not even her dearest friends, amongst whom she professed to rank Mrs. Helderton. Ermina gave a sigh of regret at such vitiated fashionable friendships, and thought how different were the sentiments she felt for the worthy nun at St. Catherine's ; nor could she resist pitying those who were incapable of enjoying the delicious sensations arising from the certainty of possessing the real regard of an estimable person. The warmest friendship Ermina had likewise felt for Lady Julia, attracted as most young people are by the beauty of her external appearance, without considering whether her mind was as excellent as her exterior was lovely and engaging ;



but, prejudiced in her favour, supposed her every thing that was good and amiable. But this friendship was destroyed ere it had reached maturity, by the capriciousness of her disposition, which severely hurt Ermina, as it proved how little dependance could be placed on her professions of regard. Mrs. Helderton made rapid advances to intimacy with her, which she did not discourage ; and, since their first introduction, the widow was continually calling to take her out airing with her.

Ermina considered herself as an unfortunate isolated being, for whose fate few in the world concerned themselves, which made her less averse to cultivating the friendship of Mrs. Helderton, though she was not a woman she would have preferred for a friend. Her understanding was weak, and her conversation often childishly absurd ; one moment appearing to have forgotten all her sorrows, and the next relapsing

lapsing into all the extravagance and wildness of woe, saying that she would not survive her husband, refusing all sustenance ; and, when Ermina, endeavouring to reconcile her to her loss, advised her to soften the bitterness of her grief with the reflection that they would meet again in another world never more to part, she would exclaim in a rage, “ Then I must die soon, for I cannot endure to see him when I am old. If I live till thirty, I shall be very aged, for I consider every woman of thirty as an old woman.” Ermina rejoined, laughing, “ From this calculation, I suppose you already consider yourself, as you are three-and-twenty, in the decline of life ; but I confess myself, I should not wish old age to commence with me at so early a period, and would wish you likewise to reject such extravagant ideas.” To little purpose, however, was Ermina’s saying this, or any argument she could

devise to cure her of these absurdities, which made her rather an object of ridicule than pity, and many people scrupled not to say her understanding was deranged. Yet, notwithstanding all these eccentricities, Mrs. Helderton was so good-humoured to Miss Montrose, and paid her attentions so flattering, that her heart, naturally affectionate, and full of gratitude, could not avoid, in some degree, returning her attachment; and she was more frequently in her society from the increasing coolness of Lady Julia's manners, which were sometimes even rude; and several instances, she had lately received, of marked incivility, made her resolve to retire into Westmoreland, and mix as rarely as possible with a world which had given her so much reason to be disgusted with it. She informed Lady Julia of her resolution, who began to apologize for her conduct, when she found she was going  
to

to quit her, as she had too much sense to be unconscious of having acted wrong. Ermina easily forgave her, but would not be persuaded to remain any longer in a house, where she was subject, from the caprice of Lady Julia, to a repetition of the same insults. She did not pass much time in regretting the friends she had to leave in London, as the number was exceedingly small, Mrs. Helderton being the only person to whom she could give that appellation ; for with no one else had she formed any intimacy. Mrs. Helderton made her promise, that when she had been a few months at the cottage, she would leave it, to make her a visit at Dulverston priory, which was her country seat, situated in the West of England, and, by her account, a most charming spot. Ermina was easily persuaded to consent to this plan, and they bade each other adieu, with many assurances of not neglecting to correspond



correspond frequently. Ermina having made the necessary arrangements for her journey the following morning, retired in the evening to her own room, which she quitted not till she sought repose. Terefe called her mistress early the next morning, as the post-chaise was at the door before nine o'clock, and Lady Julia had arisen before her usual hour to bid Ermina farewell, whom she embraced, at parting, with her former affection, requesting that, when tired of the country, she would consider her house as her home. With a suppressed smile our heroine thanked her, inwardly wishing that she might never want such a home, or be again an inmate of her house.

Accompanied by her faithful Terefe, Ermina departed from London, and, travelling all day, arrived towards evening at the town of —, where, alighting at the principal inn, after taking some slight refreshment,

freshment, she gladly retired to rest, fatigued and dispirited with her journey, which might almost be styled a solitary one, as her companion slept nearly all the way, her stock of conversation being soon exhausted, leaving Ermina with no other amusement for her unhappy mind than the recollection of unpleasant circumstances, that, in spite of every effort, obtruded themselves, and depressed her spirits. But she hoped in sleep to gain a transitory oblivion of her sorrows: this was, however, denied her, for the continual succession of company at the inn, the noise of carriages driving into the inn yard, the perpetual ringing of bells, with the calling of waiters, and a complication of other sounds, prevented her enjoying but a very indifferent night's rest. The town was crowded with people on account of an election, and, to Ermina's extreme vexation, when she wished to depart the next morning,

morning, no post-chaise could be procured, as she had not taken the precaution to engage one the evening before. Tired of her unpleasant situation at the inn, she enquired if no other carriage was to be had, and learnt that two stages were going off in a few minutes, and, if she went in either of them, that she could have a post-chaise at the next town. Rejoiced at any rate to quit her present noisy abode, Ermina sent the waiter to take two places for herself and maid, but he returned with the intelligence, that only one place was vacant in each coach. However disagreeable this was to Ermina, unaccustomed to travel alone, and particularly in such a vehicle, as there was no alternative but remaining at the inn, she preferred the stage, and appointed Terefe, as the coach she was to go in went off first, to wait till she arrived at the town, where they were to procure a post-chaise.

When

When Ermina entered the stage, a sharp, pale-faced little woman darted a fierce pair of black eyes at her, and said, "So, mem, you are come at last; I think you made us wait long enough for you." Ermina looked at her with surprise, but mildly said, "She was very sorry for it; but if it was so, it was the coachman's fault for not telling her before that the coach was waiting." This seemed to somewhat appease the lady, who then spoke in a more civil manner. From this specimen, Ermina did not look forward to a very pleasant journey; and her fellow travellers consisted of two males, and two females; and they were afterwards joined on the road by a very fat woman, with a good-humoured, pleasant countenance, and plainly dressed. Ermina amused herself in contemplating, for the first two or three miles, the group associated with her. Opposite to her sat a gentleman, whom she judged to be an officer, from his military boots,



boots; and great-coat, with a scarlet collar, in which he was wrapped. He was a tall elegant figure, about four-and-twenty years of age; his face was pleasing, though rather plain, and marked with the small pox; and he was likewise pale and thin, as if recently recovered from a fit of illness, which gave him altogether an interesting appearance. His eyes were fixed somewhat rudely on Ermina's face, which heightened the rich glow on her cheek, and she was glad by appearing to look at the rest of the passengers in the coach to seem unconscious of his evident unaltered gaze. Next to him sat the fat good-humoured lady, and that one who had so sharply accosted Ermina on her first entering, and whose tongue had never ceased chattering for a moment. From the history she gave of herself, one would have imagined her the most feeling, obliging creature ever known. She was continually expatiating on the folly and ill-

ill-nature of people, when they travelled together, in not endeavouring to accommodate each other, making use continually of her favourite word, "accommodate." Then, breaking out into the most lamentable expressions of pity for the horses, who (poor dear creatures!) she said, suffered so much fatigue; and, the smallest hill they ascended, she would almost shed tears for their sufferings, lamenting they should have the trouble of carrying her. But, with all this exquisite sensibility, she would every now and then pop her head out of the window, to scold the coachman, which was not very consistent with the character of extreme feeling she wished to have understood she possessed. Unluckily, however, for her credit, in the midst of an harangue on people's accommodating one another, by a sudden jolt of the coach, the fat lady's bonnet touched her hair, which was powdered and dressed with the utmost exactness,

ness, and this accident shook a little of the powder out. No sooner did this amiable, gentle being see its reliëts scattered on her black cloak, than her pallid countenance assumed the appearance of scarlet ; and, turning her face, replete with venom, towards the poor fat woman, who, though twice her size, shrunk before her, she said, “ It is very odd, such behaviour, mem ! I am sure I did every thing to accommodate you ; and to be treated in this manner ! ” and then, half muttered that such big people should take two places ; and a great deal more about vulgar people, and hating to be in stage coaches. Ermina could not help smiling at her miserable temper and affectation, in pretending to pity the horses, when she could, for such a trifle as the discomposure of her hair, inflict so much pain on a fellow-creature : for the violent resentment she had shewn had quite disconcerted the fat lady, who seemed to sit very uneasy. The rest of the party,

party, which consisted of a decent woman, and an Irish sailor, besides the officer, appeared to enjoy this display of the prim lady's amiable qualities, though only perceptible by a half-smile that played over their countenances; for they dreaded openly to offend her, from the fear of encountering the anger of such a vixen. The officer soon contrived to enter into conversation with Ermina, who found him an entertaining, agreeable companion. "You must be surprised," said he, "to see me so well wrapped up at this season of the year; but I am lately come from a warm climate, and am recovering from a fit of illness, which makes me susceptible of every breath of air." "Arrah! my honey," said the Irishman, interrupting him, "you are in the right; but you had better, by St. Patrick, now and then take a noggin of beer with some gin in it, and that will warm you, inside and out." The officer smiled at his prescription, the salutary



tary effects of which the sailor seemed assured of, but felt no inclination to try its efficacy, though he would not offend him, in compassion to his ignorance, by appearing to dislike it.

The coach now stopped at a shabby inn, in a small village, where all the passengers alighted whilst the horses were changed. The landlady came in (for there was no waiter) to ask if they would take any refreshment. Ermina, who had taken none since a very early breakfast, ordered a sandwich. "A sandwich!" said the Irish sailor; "what's a sandwich? I think I'll take one too; bring me one." When it was brought, and he began to eat it, "Och," says he, "'tis nothing but mustard and bread. Don't like it. I'd rather have a lump of bread and cheese, and a noggin of ale." When he had finished, he asked what it came to, and was answered, ten pence. He flew into a passion, and

and said, it was a shame to pay so much for nothing at all, at all ; and ordered some cold beef and gin to be brought him, for he was almost starved. When he again entered the coach, he was quite offensive from the quantity of spirits he had drank ; and Ermina felt so uncomfortable in such society, that she was rejoiced, when the coach stopped at the town where she was to meet her servant, whom she found waiting for her. The officer took his leave in the most polite manner, and she left the cross lady scolding furiously at the coachman, for suffering one of her boxes to be uncorded.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

*T. Davison,*  
*White-Friars.*